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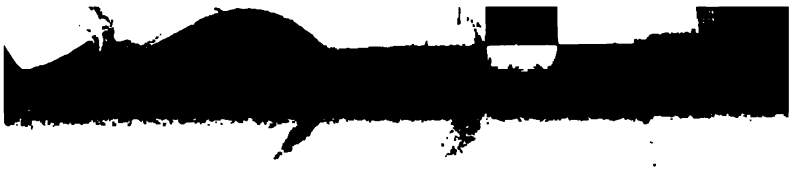

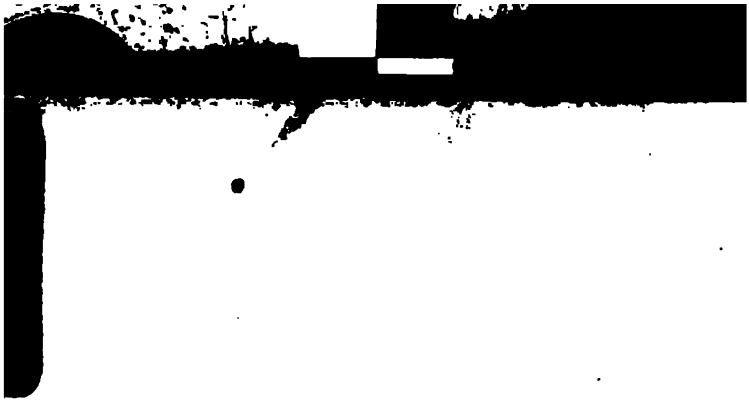

THURSDAY MORNINGS AT THE CITY TEMPLE

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BY THE

REV. R. J. CAMPBELL, M.A.

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PREFACE

THE following sermons, with a few exceptions, were preached at the Thursday mid-day service in the City Temple during the last twelve months. The Thursday congregation differs greatly in composition from that of Sunday; it is made up of more diverse elements. Not a few of those who attend habitually are out of touch with organised Christianity and never darken a church door elsewhere than at the City Temple; even then they confine their interest to this one service in the middle of the day in the middle of the week. City merchants, young clerks and shopmen, ministers and students, social workers and Labour members of Parliament are to be seen seated side by side in democratic friendliness. There are not many working men, for the reason that working men cannot easily find their way to the heart of the City of London at twelve o'clock on a working day; but occasionally a railway guard or engine-driver drops in. Women come too—some who have to get their living in the City and some who make long journeys from outlying suburbs. Altogether it is the most interesting congregation in the world, and probably one of the keenest and most intelligent; it is no slight to my Sunday congregation to say that I feel more at ease on Thursday than I do in

the more formal worship of the Sabbath. It has been a custom from the first to allow applause and interjections on Thursday which, of course, would be out of place on Sunday; Dr. Parker's practice in this respect has been continued under my ministry. It does no harm—rather, I think, the moderate indulgence in the expression of feeling by the congregation helps to keep preacher and hearers *en rapport* with each other. The only danger associated with it became apparent at the height of the New Theology controversy, when a few eccentric individuals made their way to the City Temple Thursday service with the express object of creating disturbance. Happily this behaviour has ceased without affecting for the worse the latitude allowed to the regular congregation.

It may be that the character of the congregation, and the nature of the service, have influenced to some extent the form as well as the matter of the sermons contained in this volume. They may be more colloquial and direct than is usual with pulpit utterances. As most of them were preached while the New Theology controversy was raging most fiercely, the controversial note will be detected here and there. It was impossible to avoid it, although I hope it contains nothing of bitterness and rancour. When the history of this period comes to be written, those who take the trouble to read it will be amazed at the extremes to which serious-minded people permitted themselves to go in their alarm for the orthodox positions. No falsehood, however absurd and extravagant, seems to have been too much for their eager credulity to swallow

so long as it could throw discredit upon the character and motives of the pioneers of the new movement. Of such misrepresentations the worst has been that which has credited New Theologians in general, and the minister of the City Temple in particular, with belittling sin. As a consequence there are many good people throughout the length and breadth of the land who are firmly convinced that I am a very wicked person, whose teaching denies the reality of sin and encourages men to gratify their lower nature as they think fit. One might suppose that common-sense would come to the rescue, but, when a prominent and much-respected preacher stands up before an enlightened congregation and tells his hearers that a promiscuous audience would be sure to cheer a man who tells them that sin does not matter, one begins to despair not only of common-sense but of the sense of humour, not to speak of common honesty. For there is no congregation in the wide world who would cheer any such sentiment, and no preacher has ever existed who would utter it.

The truth is, though it will be a long time before it is clearly seen, that it is the ordinary Christian doctrine of sin which blinds men's eyes to the real seriousness of sin. It is an immoral doctrine. It regards sin in a vague, unreal kind of way as something which has entered into human nature and corrupted what would otherwise have been immaculate. There never has been any such corruption: no faculty of human nature is radically and essentially bad: whether it shall be good or bad depends upon its outcome in conduct and the

character created by conduct. The ordinary doctrine ignores this, and teaches that a man can be legally justified in the sight of God by an act of faith, and can have the righteousness of some one else imputed to him. This is not only untrue but morally mischievous, and one of its most evil effects consists in the fact that it practically ignores sins of omission. It is this which, more than anything else, lies at the root of the alienation between the churches and the masses in every country of the civilised world to-day. This doctrine of abstract justification for abstract sin enables people to go on living comfortable, self-satisfied lives while assuring themselves that they are washed in the blood of the Lamb and on their way to heaven. It enables the religious plutocrat to exploit the poor while remaining a devout believer in the efficacy of the Atonement of Christ. It enables most men to separate their standing with God from their duty towards their fellows. It fails altogether to take cognisance of the fact that the whole aim and purpose of the message of Jesus was not to induce men to get their sins forgiven but to lay down the life of selfhood to take it again in the larger good of humanity as a whole. The emphasis is entirely different, and the New Theology is an attempt to recover the strenuous moral note of the teaching of Jesus. All through these pages it will be seen that that object has been kept well in view.

It is perhaps too much to hope that those whose eyes are blinded to the artificiality of the traditional doctrine of sin should be able to see this and to

recognise that, so far from belittling moral obligations, the New Theology insists upon them with a clearness and force which has long been wanting to the old; but at least they might show a charitable spirit, and, if they continue to hold to forms of stating religious truth which they regard as of vital importance, they need not believe that those who challenge them are necessarily less sincere and earnest than themselves.

The advocacy of Socialism by most of the exponents of the New Theology has helped to create additional prejudice against their theological views. It is as well that it should be so, for no theology is worth the preaching which does not find a social expression. The combination may make progress a little slower, but the ultimate triumph of the principles enunciated in the New Theology is made all the more certain by their practical application to social needs. Whether theology lives or dies I care but little; it is humanity I love and fain would serve. The day is not far distant when the religion of Jesus Christ, the glad tidings of the Kingdom of God, will regain all its former power over the toilers of the world, and inspire them with faith and hope in the dawning of a better and a more glorious day.

R. J. CAMPBELL.

May 19, 1908.

CONTENTS

		PAGE
	PREFACE	v
I.	THE IMAGE OF GOD	1
II.	KNOWING GOOD AND EVIL	16
III.	TRAMPLING THE SERPENT	30
IV.	JACOB'S WRESTLING	44
V.	THE INNER VOICE	59
VI.	THE ROCK AND THE PIT	74
VII.	THE SOCIAL JUDGMENT	89
VIII.	MINISTERING THE BREAD OF LIFE	106
IX.	THE HATE THAT IS LOVE	121
X.	THE MASTER ON THE SHORE	139
XI.	SOWING AND REAPING	155
XII.	CHRIST DYING FOR SINNERS	174
XIII.	THE TWO NATURES	193
XIV.	SPIRITUAL STRENGTH	210
XV.	FAMINE AND PLENTY	223
XVI.	THE SILENCE OF HEAVEN	239
XVII.	THE CRYSTAL SEA	254
XVIII.	THE HOLY CITY AND ITS TEMPLE	266
XIX.	THE LAMB'S BOOK OF LIFE	284
XX.	THE LIFE BEYOND	298

THURSDAY MORNINGS AT THE CITY TEMPLE

I

THE IMAGE OF GOD

"So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them."—GEN. i. 27.

IT should be fairly clear from a statement of this kind that the phrase "in the image of God" means more than the crude anthropomorphic idea that man is like his Maker in the structure of his physical frame. In fact, it is not the physical frame that the writer is thinking about, although millions have read this venerable sentence in that sense; and even now there are some who seem to think of God as having two eyes, two hands, and two feet; and of man as being like God because similarly furnished. But anthropomorphisms of this kind have become repugnant to the mind of the generation in which we live, and it is well that it should be so. We have, I hope, for ever outgrown the state of mind which led mediæval monks to represent the Trinity as three men standing in one pair of boots. But there are some other anthropomorphisms which we have not outgrown,

and I suppose never will. Indeed, it is difficult to see how we ever could. I refer, of course, to the practice of picturing or describing God as having human attributes. We are always being told of the absurdity of trying to represent the infinite by means of finite analogies. But how can we help it? We can but read God through what we know of man. We can know nothing else about Him. It has often been pointed out that the most original artist or poet can invent nothing which does not already exist in nature, and is familiar to all who have eyes to see. He may portray the most grotesque monsters, but every one of them must have feet, or wings or tail; he cannot invest them with any physical attribute the like of which has never been known before. He may draw monstrous wings, claws, and tails, but still they are wings, claws, and tails of the same order as those of the creatures we see walking or flying about every day. It is just the same in the realm of religion. Man builds his God from what he knows of himself, only he tries to make Him bigger. Sometimes he succeeds in making Him grotesque or even horrible, but the attributes with which he credits Him are all the while his very own. In the breast of a savage there is not much room for pity, so his God has none. He observes the terrible effect of power in human hands or in the world without, so he promptly thinks of God as hurling thunderbolts or tearing mountains from their foundations, without much care as to what happens to the weaker beings who cower in fear before Him. The God of the savage, you see, is

just a big savage. As time goes on men's ideas of the Creator expand with their self-knowledge, and are as full of contradictions as they themselves are. Man lords it over creation; he therefore imagines that he represents the supreme effort of the Almighty and the sum of His interests; he cannot easily bring himself to think that God may have other interests. He is conceited even in his self-abasement; and when he acknowledges his loathsomeness before God he still imagines that God has nothing else to think about but him. He bullies and crushes woman; *she* is not made in the image of God, bless you! God is an almighty *He*. Who ever heard of such a thing as woman being made in the image of God? In fact, is it not more reasonable to suppose that woman's mischief-making influence has been responsible for preventing man from being a better image of God than he actually is?

This is the way we have been talking for a good many centuries, and we can hardly be surprised at the tendency or its results. There is no mistake about the fact that God has all along been thought of as the magnified projection of man, as man knows himself. He has credited God with his own cruelties, whimsicalities, pride and vanity, petty jealousies, and general unreasonableness. Happily this has not been the whole of the picture. It is not that we are too anthropomorphic when we picture God, but that we are not anthropomorphic enough. Men have read something else in their own hearts besides vindictiveness and desire for the subjection of others, and in their

hours of illumination they have seen that this, too, must belong to God. Then came Jesus, that crowning product of the long and painful struggle of humanity towards that manhood which seeks not its own good, but only the best for all, and henceforth they have thought of God as love revealed in sacrifice. Too often they have proved traitor to this conception; too often they have seen only a small part of what it means; but little by little, and age by age, the whole civilised world is moving on into the light that shines from the cross of Jesus.

But how strange and sad it is that even to-day men should be so slow to see what is involved in the venerable declaration that God is love! At one time we speak as though His love involved a kind of yearning sentimentality over wayward children whom He seeks to recover from the consequences of their folly; in the next breath we speak of Him as the implacable guardian of a righteousness which can concede nothing to His love. Truly, the contradictions of the religious mind are manifold as well as pathetic. The ordinary pre-suppositions of evangelical Christianity are utterly absurd, and every one of us must have felt their unreality from time to time. The fact is we seem to have two Gods whom we call one, but who by no possible stretch of the imagination could be combined in one personality. The first is a sort of old woman who made the world and man as though He expected every thing to go right, and no evil or misery to mar the work of His hands. But He laid His plans so badly that the whole scheme

went awry, and heaven has been in mourning ever since. Poor God! He is not to blame, the theologians tell us; it is wicked man—more especially woman. God has done His best, and the result has been untold ages of chaos and unimaginable suffering. All God can do is to provide a redeemer to save a few out of the wreck, and to keep on pleading with humanity—"O prodigal child, come home." You will, I am sure, forgive me for the seeming irreverence of saying *that* God is a fool. And the other God—or God with the other face—is not much better. This other God has prepared a hell for the poor helpless victims of what is called His righteous wrath. He has made it big enough to contain the whole race, and into it the whole race will have to go unless they repent in time and avail themselves of the sufferings which He has graciously inflicted upon somebody else for their benefit. He has been sitting up there in heaven ever since Creation first went wrong, brooding darkly over what He means to do to perverse and rebellious man when his time comes. One would think that perverse and rebellious man had not had such a specially good time already, and that, on the whole, there was not much need of the additional torments which we are told divine justice is preparing for everybody indiscriminately. This is a hateful sort of a God which the theologians have made in their own image, and I hope He will soon be dead and buried.

Just face the facts for a moment. Has the God of the revival meeting ever existed? Could He exist and yet be God? Has the God with the

ready-made hell ever existed? Could He exist and yet be God? Put yourself in the place of the Supreme Being for a moment—if such a thing is remotely conceivable. Make God in your own image so far as to imagine yourself endowed with omnipotence and seated on the throne of eternal glory. Look down upon the world as it now is, and what will you do? Will the "prodigal-child-come-home" business satisfy you? Can you hear the sobs of little children who are hungry and cold, or ill-treated, or dying of painful disease? Can you watch with equanimity yonder strong man battling with heavy odds, and yet feeling the ground give way beneath him as he struggles? What is going to become of the wife and bairns when that fiend called consumption or cancer, which has been slowly strangling him for years, has tightened its fateful grip and crushed the breath out of him at last? Did you hear that mother's shriek of agony just now when her boy was brought home dead, mangled to pieces by the machinery in the workshop where he earned her living as well as his own? Could you have saved him—you God, you—or did you think it was not worth while? Are you going to tell me that you are very sorry for humanity, but that, of course, it has brought all this upon itself? Are you going to maintain that we have sinned against you? Are you not sinning against us? What are you doing, sitting up there on your sapphire throne, and letting people come into this torture-chamber with the glad tidings of your marvellous love? What do you mean by your marvellous love? You have

plenty, and we are starving! You can see, and we are blind! You have omnipotence, and we are crushed by pitiless fate! And what about that hell of yours? Ought you not to be in it for awhile yourself? Bah! you are contemptible, you King of kings and Lord of lords, if you have nothing more to say than that you will accept our penitence and remit our tortures when we are dead if we only believe! I would rather trust my own humanity than your divinity.

This is, I admit, a rather startling way of putting the case. Remember, I am addressing *you*, you upon the throne of God. What would you do if you were there? It is quite a legitimate thing to put you there, for you are made in His image, you see. And so indeed you are. God may be incomparably wiser and better than you, but His goodness must surely be at least equal to yours. Can you imagine yourself, then, seated on that sapphire throne and doing nothing while the world welters in agony and blood? You made it, you know; you are responsible, no one so much as you; and you can alter it, for you are omnipotent. Why don't you do it? From this point of view is not ordinary Christian talk about God fairly near to blasphemy? You can see how utterly and lamentably it breaks down in the presence of the facts of life when once we look them squarely in the face. What is the God of conventional religion but a big plutocrat who talks of the wickedness of the victims He crushes under the chariot-wheels of His success? Imagine a man in the place of God. Imagine him so wise that he never makes

a mistake, so rich that all the wealth of the world is as a drop in the ocean to his abundance, so strong that he can carry the whole universe in the palm of his hand. Then imagine this big, strong, wealthy man talking about his own goodness and contrasting it with the wickedness of the little human beings who, he says, have been sinning against him. Would you not instantly question his assumption of superiority and even his right to call the world wicked? Would you not ask him how we are to judge of his goodness? He is superior to all the ills of life; he knows nothing of the force of temptation; he is not subject to the delusions of ordinary human ignorance. And yet he sits in his heaven, enthroned far above all reach of evil, and allows the awful torrent of human anguish and iniquity to pour on in its dreadful course. I say, imagine a man endowed with divine power and behaving like this. Pick up any ordinary broker from the Stock Exchange, and seat him on the eternal throne, and imagine him taking this point of view about himself in relation to humanity as a whole. What would you call him? I think, perhaps, you would call him a scoundrel or a maniac, but you would neither love nor adore him. You would make no pretence about the matter. If you had a spark of manliness in you you would shake your fist in his face and tell him that in your helplessness you were greater than he. And yet, remember, the God whom many of us devoutly worship is neither more nor less to our imagination than a kind of big man whom we credit with conduct which would disgrace the ordinary man of

our everyday acquaintance. Is it not obvious? The moment we try to put ourselves in the place of God we begin to see how impossible are some of our most familiar conceptions of His nature and doings. Why, we are better than the God in whom we profess to believe.

No, the truth is that neither the sentimental God of the revival meeting nor the God with the ready-made hell would be tolerable to us for a moment if we were really to put one of ourselves in His place. The worst of our anthropomorphic religion is that we have all along been picturing a man on the throne of the universe, but a wrong-headed kind of a man, a man who does not behave quite so well as we should in his place if we followed the promptings of our better nature. If we must make God in the image of man, why cannot we make Him as noble and truly human as man can show himself to be at his best? You may say that that is precisely what we do when we call Him a God of love. But you are wrong; we do not. The love of God must mean something different from what the ordinary Christian says it means, or else this sad and weary world would be different from what it is. It is, I verily believe, a dim perception of this fact which has led men to try to apologise for God, as it were, by throwing all the blame of the world's woe upon the shoulders of humanity. When a man ceases to try to do this, he gives up his God of love. There are thousands of men in this and every other civilised country to-day who have given up believing in God, because they feel that if there were such a God as the Christian

believes in He would not tolerate such a world as this for a single hour. There, then, is your dilemma. It is absolutely impossible to believe in the God of ordinary Christian dogma. Is it, then, impossible to believe in any Supreme Being to whom the name of love could fitly be applied? I think not, but we shall have to read more into that word "love" than most people ever seem to think of doing. There is no need to shrink from the anthropomorphic argument if only we are willing to give it scope enough. Imagine a man upon the throne of the universe, if you like, but credit him with the best of which earthly humanity has yet shown itself capable. Do not go back on that; hold firmly to it, permit no half-measures. Believe it to be incredible that God—or the universal order —could produce in your mother that which is superior to itself. God's excellence may be something infinitely greater than frail humanity has yet produced, but we cannot be deceived in thinking that that which is morally beautiful in man must be worthy even of God. You may call this begging the question, but, if so, you are welcome to think so. I absolutely refuse to believe that the universe which could produce the heart and mind of Jesus is not the outcome of a heart and mind at least as great and noble. I would willingly rest my whole faith on that one proposition. I face life in the strength of it. God may be inconceivably better than my best, but He must not be worse. I am even willing to admit that good and evil are relative terms which will lose their significance when we come to experience infinite blessed-

ness, but it is safe to affirm that God is all we mean by good, and infinitely more. Cling fast to that, and it will bear you through most of the ills that can assail the soul in this world or the next. There is a profound wisdom, and a bold and reverent worship, in the lines which supplied George MacDonald with the inspiration for one of his best-known books:

> Here lie I, Martin Elginbrod;
> Have mercy on my soul, Lord God,
> As I would do, if I were God,
> And Thou wert Martin Elginbrod.

But there is a position even beyond this to which I wish we people of the Western world could better accustom ourselves. It is this: To be made in the image of God involves far more than most of us in our present state of probation ever dream of. If we only knew all that it means to say that man is made in the image of God we should cease to be perplexed by the age-long problem of pain, and sorrow, and sin. So far from seeing in these things an indictment of the love of God we should see in them the demonstration of it. Love is a far greater thing than the finite mind can grasp; it is not merely a part of life but the whole of it. I seem to be speaking in riddles, but wait a moment. Ask yourself what it is that by general consent we feel to be greatest and most divine in man—that is, most worthy of God, if God there be—and you do not need to wait long for the answer. It is that awe-inspiring something which outshines all merely moral considerations in obedience to the inward impulse to realise all life as one. When

ever you meet it you have no doubt about it. It may be allied to a religious profession or it may not, but we know it at once for the deepest thing in our nature. We may fairly say that all history is a commentary upon it, and that its presence is the one thing which renders human life worthy of an immortal destiny. You know well enough what I mean. I mean that in you which at some great moment makes you willing and ready to accept annihilation for the sake of the larger life of which yours is but a part. Something tells you, preacher or no preacher, that this is somehow the thing for you to do. You are not always like it; in fact, you are very seldom like it; but you are never in any danger of mistaking it when it comes. When the enemy is at the gate, and some child of the home-land accepts torture and death rather than betray his country, we make songs about it and tell the story to our children and our children's children. When plague and pestilence are desolating whole communities we honour and revere the men and women who go to meet death with a smile in the cause of struggling life. Even when the great deed has nothing dramatic or outwardly impressive to recommend it, or when it is a deed which covers the whole life, we feel just the same about it if we are able to see clearly and truly what that deed or life really is. During the earlier part of my ministry in Brighton I was once called upon to remonstrate with a poor woman whose besetting sin was drink. Inquiry revealed where the temptation had come from, but that is a question into which I need not enter. Months after-

wards I heard that the poor creature was dead. She had died of pneumonia contracted while walking around her room with her baby on a cold winter's night. She had stripped herself to keep the child warm, and her constitution, already enfeebled by poverty and foolish habits, had succumbed to the chill which followed. The friend who told me the circumstances added that the most affecting thing about that poor woman's death was her solicitude about the children she was leaving. All thought about her own fate in the next world was completely absent. Neither heaven nor hell entered into her calculation. The only thing she was afraid of was leaving her children to be knocked about in this world without a protector. Only two or three people at most would ever hear of the manner of that woman's death or realise the greatness of soul which shone forth therein. But do we not feel much the same about it as we do about the soldier who dies at his post or the fireman who loses his life in the effort to save a child from a burning building? In this poor, ignorant, even debased human being something was displayed which helps us to feel that humanity is not entirely of the dust. Nobody would quarrel with you for saying that. My point is that, although we may be blind to the greatness of a life or a deed while it is being enacted in our midst, we always reverence it when we see it for what it is. The world always has done so, and always will; it is the one thing that stirs the soul in reading history or in viewing life as it unfolds itself before our eyes. In fact, our blindness in particular instances does not

matter much; the splendour of the life or the deed may even be enhanced by the blindness of the world as to its true nature. If we only see the thing itself we are nobler by the vision, even though we may discern it in but one instance out of a thousand. We may see it in one and ignore it in another, but if we can see it all we bow before it and worship. You know now what I am talking about, don't you? I am talking about the cross. I am talking about that which has given the name of Jesus its power over men's hearts. A Christ without the cross would be no Christ. We may go farther and say, a God without the cross would be no God; man without the cross would not be man. What we are witnessing in this strange, sad, earthly life of ours, with its impenetrable mysteries and sharp limitations, is the forthcoming of the God in man by means of the cross. Why, you know it is so, every one of you. The seeming evil of life is but the means towards that grand end, and the gain is worth the price. The very thing which at times staggers us and makes us feel that there can be no God is the thing that makes the God in ourselves a reality. Made in the image of God! I should think so. What is God? He is that which shows itself in man when he lays down his life at the call of duty or what is beyond and above duty. Yes, I have seen God on His sapphire throne. I saw Him in that mother of the slums; I see Him in you as you rise triumphant over that which is base and sordid in your endeavour to serve that which is holy and true. I have seen Him in that fleeting look which can

make a coarse face beautiful when the soul is stirred to noble aim and high endeavour. I have seen His glory in the light that sometimes flames out of the midnight blackness of human cruelty and depravity. Life has no other meaning than this; it is the manifestation of God in man. Evil will not last for ever; it is the cross whereby we mount the throne of divine glory. Every victory over evil is a manifestation of divine love. No lesser manifestation would be worthy of the name of love; and from this point of view all life is love—that is, the self-giving of God. Can you see it? I would not exchange the knowledge that it brings for all that heaven could show apart from it. As the poet makes the man say to the angel:

All your beauty cannot win
  Truth we learn in pain and sighs;
You can never enter in
  To the circle of the wise.

They are but the slaves of light
  Who have never known the gloom,
And between the dark and bright
  Willed in freedom their own doom.

Brother pilgrims through the darkness, let this truth sustain you in your conflicts or your passive endurance. It is the gospel at the heart of every creed; it is all life has to teach. Reveal the image of God, the real God who suffers and achieves in you. Say to yourselves as you go to meet the task that waits for you outside the door, To-day the eternal light must shine through me; to-day God shall be glorified in what these feeble hands can do; to-day, to-morrow, and to all eternity what is born of love shall live in the life that never dies.

II

KNOWING GOOD AND EVIL

"*Your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.*"—GEN. iii. 5.

THE story of the temptation and fall of primitive man, as given in this chapter, is one of considerable interest and no little difficulty. It presents problems which up to now have proved to be practically insoluble. In its present literary form it is of comparatively late date; but a far more important question is that of the nature of the different elements contained or presumed in the narrative as it now stands. One of the most perplexing of these elements is that which forms our text: "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." If the mind of the average Bible reader were not so uncritical, and if it were not so commonly taken for granted that the story of the Fall, as contained in the book of Genesis, is exactly the same as the modern doctrine of the Fall, this sentence would be sure to arrest attention at once. There are some startling things here. Some primitive beliefs are taken for granted which are far removed from our ordinary way of looking at the relations of God and man to-day. Let us look into this question for a moment.

According to the legend as it stands, Adam and Eve, the primitive man and the primitive woman of tradition, lived in the Garden of Eden in a state of complete innocence. They were forbidden to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and were told by the Almighty that disobedience in this respect would mean immediate death. Then the serpent comes along—how this serpent comes by his wisdom is not explained—and tells them that God has been deceiving them: they will not die, and that God knows they will not die; that, in fact, His real motive in forbidding them to eat of this particular tree is that He knows they will become as wise as Himself. The peculiar use of the plural number—"gods," instead of "God"—ought to be noted here, for it is not without significance. It seems to me that we have here a distinct reference to that belief in the jealousy of the gods so characteristic of many ancient peoples. I suppose you all know what I mean. Readers of Greek literature will not need to be reminded of the frequent recurrence of references to the jealousy which the gods were supposed to feel lest humanity should aspire to their wisdom and strength. It was held that all human misfortunes were traceable to this source. So soon as a man became wiser, braver, and more fortunate than his fellows, he was sure to excite the jealousy of the gods, who forthwith proceeded to work him harm. The legend concerning Prometheus is of this order. Prometheus was punished for having conferred a boon upon humanity by stealing fire from heaven wherewith to increase their power over natural forces;

certainly no greater step forward in the history of the race has ever been taken than that which followed from the discovery of the use of fire. But, according to the Greek form of the myth, the gods were so exasperated with Prometheus for having conferred this boon upon mankind that he was chained to a rock for the offence, and his flesh was torn by vultures. Here in this Genesis story we have a Semitic version of the attitude of the gods towards any aspirations of mankind in the direction of divine wisdom and power. The use of the plural number shows that in its original form the story was polytheistic. Here we have the gods telling primitive man that he must not seek to know too much, or he will be destroyed. When he yields to the temptation, however, he is not destroyed, but all kinds of evil results pursue him. Another interesting point is the reason given for driving him out of Eden. "Behold the man is become *as one of us*, to know good and evil"—plural number again, you see. "And now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat and live for ever: therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken." Here we are distinctly told that the motive for sending man away from his pleasant surroundings was that he might possibly aspire to the immortality of a divine being, and this the gods were resolved not to permit. The two trees—the tree of knowledge and the tree of life respectively—are plainly intended as the symbols of an experience wherein man becomes a sharer in the privileges of deity. Who the serpent

was it is impossible to say. He does not answer either to the dragons of other Semitic myths or to the Satan of later Jewish religion. It is clear, at any rate, that his appearance at this stage is out of ill-will to the deity, whom he wishes to vex by tempting mankind to a dangerous disobedience.

In this brief examination of the story presumed in our text I have necessarily had to leave some interesting questions on one side, as having nothing to do with the subject I wish to discuss this morning. But sufficient has been said, I trust, to show that the original *motif* of this peculiar saying was not of the most exalted order. Probably this sentence is one of the oldest parts of the literary whole which constitutes this chapter. It assumes a plurality of divine beings, a sort of cosmic aristocracy who are most unwilling that man should enter into their fellowship and share their privileges. Hence, when he takes one step forward they prevent him from taking a second by expelling him from the conditions where it would be possible. The threat that he would surely die was a piece of deceit such as those ancient deities were quite capable of, and was merely intended to deter him from attaining to a knowledge which might make him dangerous to them. There was no question of right and wrong about the matter. It was very much like the behaviour of a civilised race to a subject one, such as was exemplified in the history of the South African Chartered Company when the natives were warned to let the telegraph wires alone. The method adopted in giving the warning

was to make a few of them take hold of the wires to which an electric battery was attached. As a result, of course, they received a severe shock, and were forthwith informed that this was what would always happen if they touched the telegraph wires, only that the shock would be more severe, and would be certain to cause a sudden and painful death. I think the parallel is obvious in the case of this Genesis story, or that part of it, at any rate, which forms my text. Probably by this time the eyes of South African natives are so far opened that they know what telegraph wires are for, and why the white men wished them to let them alone.

I have felt it imperative to scrutinise the principal ideas thus presumed in the text, because it is not honest to read into any Scripture passage what is not there. If this were all my text had to tell us, I should not care to pursue the subject farther, although most of you will admit that it is at least interesting. But the most striking thing about it is the tempter's statement of the reason why it was worth while to eat of the tree of knowledge. He says the gods know good and evil, and that man can enter into their knowledge. Now what can this mean? It seems to me that we have in this expression an example of profound psychological insight. The knowledge of good and evil is a higher state of consciousness than that of the beings which are below humanity in the scale of existence. Moreover, the desire to possess or increase this knowledge is the root motive of every act of moral transgression. I wish to examine these two allied propositions before proceeding to

apply to our own experience the lesson they contain.

In the first place, then, I remark that the knowledge of good and evil is a higher stage of consciousness than that possessed by the lower creation; when man first arrived at this altitude he may be said to have crossed the threshold between the brute and the god. The insight displayed in this passage is therefore truly marvellous, so early in the history of man's thought about himself. I do not wish to read too much into it. It is possible that by the phrase "good and evil" the writer only means "the secrets of existence." He may mean the command of resources, the power to distinguish between what is beneficial and what is not. The primitive man of Genesis is shown to be a helpless dependent upon the bounty of the gods; the gods themselves are masters of all the forces of earth and air and sea; they know how to use them, and what will hurt and what will not. I am afraid this is all we can say with certainty as to the meaning of this statement, but I think we are justified in inferring a little more. I will tell you why I think so. Early as this sentence may be, it is not so early as the wisdom of the East, which has always insisted that the knowledge of good and evil, in the sense of choosing between a higher and a lower, was a stage intermediate between simple consciousness and divine consciousness. Some forms of this teaching have been wholly pessimistic, and have amounted to the declaration that it would have been better never to have possessed this knowledge at all; but the best of them have held that

it must be accepted in order to be transcended; that is, we must know good and evil in order to arrive at a realisation of that state of being wherein is neither good nor evil, but only the unbroken blessedness of the eternal life. So ancient is this teaching, extending apparently from far Japan to the shores of Greece, that I cannot but feel that it has had some influence upon the wording of my text. To know good and evil, then, means to have arrived at that stage of self-consciousness wherein it becomes possible to see and choose a higher in the presence of a lower. There must have come a day in the history of the world when the first glimmerings of a conscience became apparent in that part of God's creation which, in virtue of that very discovery, became something which the rest of creation was not. It is impossible to say when that hour arrived. We cannot say even now when it first arrives in the dawning consciousness of a child. But it did arrive; and because of it man began to know himself, and to know himself potentially divine. He saw before him the triple ideal of the true, the beautiful, and the good. He did not see, and does not yet see, how far this trinity in unity can take him; but he knows he ought to seek it, and he knows that to turn his back upon it is to disobey his own highest.

But this knowledge has been bought at a heavy price. When the good to be sought first opened before him, the bad to be avoided opened also with sinister force. The beasts of the field know nothing of duty, and hence they know nothing of guilt; they are naked and unashamed. It is far otherwise

with man. He knows something which his brother creatures do not know, and hence he can not only rise higher but sink lower than they. Compare, for instance, the trickeries and lies of some fashionable society lady, who degrades her body to pay her bridge debts, with the unconscious dignity of her Newfoundland dog; *he* knows nothing of foulness and deceit. Or compare the meanness and craftiness of the bookmaker, who ensnares unwary youth, with the simple innocence of the horse he drives or makes bets upon; the horse knows nothing of the unholy triumph of getting the better of a fellow-creature. I do not care to enter too narrowly into the question thus indicated. We are now face to face with the old antinomy between philosophy and religion. Philosophy can find little scope for human freedom; it tends to throw all the responsibility for human wrong-doing upon God, and thus to eliminate all sense of moral responsibility. Broadly speaking, this is the conclusion to which philosophy, hand in hand with science, is taking us at the present time, and on purely intellectual grounds I can see no escape from it. The more closely we examine into the nature of a moral choice the more the reality of that choice tends to disappear. But, on the other hand, religion, hand in hand with morality, insists just as strenuously on man's power of self-direction and self-control, and his responsibility for the use of that power. This is a position with which we cannot afford to trifle, and, to tell the truth, there seems little or no disposition to trifle with it. We all know well enough that the very foundations of

our social existence rest upon belief in the reality of human freedom and the power of distinguishing between right and wrong. You will hear theologians cry out from time to time that So-and-so is destroying the sanctions of morality. Do not be afraid. No one can destroy the sanctions of morality; the good sense of the general public, religious and non-religious, will take care of that. But, all the same, we have to admit that antinomy in thought. On the one hand we have the absolute sovereignty of God; on the other, the freedom of the human will. It is difficult to see, too, how there can be any real knowledge of good which does not imply knowledge of evil. How can the real nature of any positive excellence be understood except in the presence of its opposite? It seems, therefore, that any advance from simple consciousness to a knowledge of God must lie along the pathway of the choice between good and evil. I do not shrink from affirming this, for it will hold good whatever view we take of the relations of God and the soul.

We come now to the further question of the root motive of sin. Is it not always the desire to know, to gather into one's self and possess that which lies beyond the present threshold of experience? If you will interrogate some young lad who has gone wrong amid the temptations of a great city you will find that what first lured him on was the desire to enter untrodden regions and taste forbidden fruit. Watch your own children, boy or girl, and you will learn a good deal that seems to have been present to the mind of the writer of this

Old Testament passage. The thing that fascinates is the unknown; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life begin in curiosity. I have heard of a man who had tried every vice and every form of excess usual with voluptuaries, and pronounced them rotten. He had plunged into them, he said, because of the fascination of wanting to know what they were like; the only result was nausea and remorse. It may be contended that there are some forms of sin which cannot be thus explained, and I quite agree. Meanness and treachery, for instance, are not a rush for the tree of knowledge, but they are part of the result of eating the forbidden fruit. Such sins as meanness and treachery always appear as the servants of some deeper motive. When a man cheats at cards or slanders a friend, he does so because of some course of action he has already adopted; he has been in search of something just beyond his reach, and these are means towards helping him to obtain it. Thus when Adam had eaten his apple he tried to shift the blame upon Eve, as he has been doing ever since. The man who first wrote that story was a pretty shrewd observer of human nature. You smile, but I am perfectly serious.

Adam's cowardly lie about Eve is still being told in the wickedly unjust social custom which ruins a woman for an offence from which the greater sinner goes scot free; it is just the same old lie. But I must not allow you to lose sight of my immediate point, which is that all sin begins in the desire to know, to possess, to absorb into one's

consciousness that which lies beyond it. All forms of sin owe their being ultimately to this.

Now there is nothing intrinsically blameworthy about this impulse; blameworthiness begins with the mode of its exercise. Curiosity has been the compelling motive in every great discovery which has yet been made for the benefit of the human race. An expedition is just being got ready for the purpose of attempting to reach the South Pole; we should not say that those who have organised it deserve censure on account of the sinfulness of their action; quite the contrary. No; the sinfulness of sin arises from the fact that it is an attempt to separate between one man's good and another's; there is no sin which is not this. It is the desire to subordinate the larger to the lesser, the higher to the lower. There is no such thing as sin which the sinner does not know to be sin. When preachers and theologians assert the contrary, they are just talking nonsense. The essence of sin, I repeat, is the attempt to separate between the good of the individual and that of the race. Nothing is good for me which does not imply larger life for you, and nothing is good for you which means deprivation and loss to me; our goal is one. At our present stage of self-consciousness it necessarily seems that my interest is separable from yours and from the whole, but it is not so, and the saints and seers of the race have always been telling us that it is not so. The way to arrive at the highest life, which is full knowledge of God, is to be willing to surrender the gratification of the finite self, and to live as though the only self were God. The man

who is doing this crucifies the poor little finite *ego* at every turn, and yet he does so because he sees that self-service in the lower sense bars the way to that self-realisation which consists in living the life of love, which is the life of God. This is the life that Jesus lived, and therefore, in a world where other people were not living it, He had to be nailed to a cross; but then—here is the wonderful thing about this life—he who lives it would rather be nailed to a cross than be without it, and while any selfishness or unhappiness remains in the world he will gladly and willingly go on accepting the cross until there is nothing left but love.

I am afraid some of you will feel that this is a statement which needs expansion, and some time I shall hope to return to it. For the moment, what I want you to see is that the tempter in my text and in human experience everywhere only speaks the literal truth. The sinner does become wise, with a terrible wisdom; he does know good and evil, but it is from the under side. The attempt to capture life and subordinate it to the lesser self is inevitably to lose it. The eating of the forbidden fruit means sooner or later that the eyes are opened to the worthlessness of the gratification thus attained, and the result is shame and remorse. There is no lasting joy except the joy of love. No sinful deed ever achieves what it seeks. As George Eliot puts it: "It was not worth doing wrong for; nothing ever is in this world."

Among those who hear me this morning there may be some who need this word of warning. Before you stretches the great unknown, and your

soul is stretching out towards it. There is nothing wrong in that; but what will you do with it? Some of you are absorbed in the rush for commercial success. Well, be it so, but understand it for what it is; this is only one mode in which the soul reaches out towards the infinite. It is not money you are after, even though you think it is; it is self-expression. You want to expand your consciousness of life, to reach forth and gather in from the boundless beyond. If it were not for that longing there would never be any millionaires, neither would there be any bankrupts. But if in this form of self-expression you mistake the means for the end, and lose the soul amid its own machinery, you will learn a lesson indeed, but it will be a sad one; later on you will come to know the good you have missed and the evil you have gained. Still more, if on the road to material success you crush down a weaker brother, and continue your advance over his prostrate fortunes, or if you enrich yourself at the expense of the community whence your resources are drawn, you will live to rue the day. The hour of disenchantment will surely come, and you will know the emptiness and the sadness of the life that is lived for self alone. No life is worth the living, no joy is worth the having, that is not love. Each for all and all for each is the spiritual law that binds the universe together and makes it a universe at all. Disobey that law, and you become wise with the wisdom that knows good and evil; but the former has eluded your grasp, and left only the sadness of disillusionment behind.

It is the same with every form of sin in which you try to indulge. The tempter (your baser self) always says: "You shall know what you yearn to know," and he is right. But to come out on the under side of that knowledge is hell. You love a woman; have you sinned for her? Then you have lost her. You want to sit on the seats of the mighty; have you broken a heart to get there? Then your coronation is damnation. You want the glittering bauble of worldly success. Well, you can have it, but if it represents only what you have stolen from humanity, instead of what you have ministered to it of more abundant life, it will be to you the messenger of death. If at this moment you are meditating some deed that means snatching at the good of another—some lie that is murder, some smile that is the Judas kiss, some honeyed word that is the tongue of the serpent—beware! You know not what you do. You are telling God that you believe His universe is ordered so that the lie can prosper as well as the truth. Pause, ere it be too late, and you have to know in sorrow the wisdom of God concerning the wages of sin. For, believe me, there is but one way to eternal bliss, and that is the laying down of life that all may live.

III

TRAMPLING THE SERPENT

"I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."—GEN. iii. 15.

THIS part of the Bible is not preached from so much as it used to be, because, I suppose, both preachers and hearers have become somewhat bewildered as to what they ought to think about it. Time was when the difficulty did not exist to the devout Christian. He was brought up to believe that the Garden of Eden was an historical spot, just as real as, say, Hyde Park, and that Adam and Eve were personalities just as distinctive as his own grandparents, and with similar failings. The exegesis of my text would not have troubled him at all. He would have taken for granted that the serpent was the devil; that the seed of the woman here alluded to was Jesus Christ; and that the bruising which was to take place would be that which was finally accomplished at Calvary. Jesus bruised the devil by redeeming mankind from his fateful grip, and the devil bruised Jesus by rendering His suffering and death a necessity. Any other explanation than this of the passage which forms our text would have been deemed unthinkable.

But for some time past this explanation has ceased to satisfy intelligent people, no matter how orthodox they may think themselves to be in other respects. So the subject simply disappears from the pulpit. Preachers let it alone. And yet there is no need that they should; if the cruder explanation has ceased to be possible, it has only made way for a larger and truer. In what I am now about to say, therefore, I wish you to understand that my main object is to bring out and apply to present-day conditions the essential spiritual truth underlying this and all such-like Bible narratives. If there were no spiritual truth here; if it were simply a meaningless fable, I should say so with perfect frankness, for I do not believe there is anything whatever to be gained by pretending to see what does not exist. But there is a great truth here, a truth which was really present to the minds of those who originally told the story, as well as those who made literature of it. The critical problem is a very complicated one, and is still to a large extent unsolved, but we can get near enough to a solution to be able to see the main ideas declared in our text. Legend or legends and literature, the story in its present form draws upon two main sources—the Babylonian and the North Arabian, and these two were originally so different that they have projected inconsistent elements into the Genesis version. Probably, if we could get back far enough into the dim regions of Semitic legend and folk-lore, we should find that the serpent was at one time the personification of wisdom, and at another the personification of evil. In one part of this nar-

rative it appears as the well-meaning friend of man, whereas in our text it is shown as a malignant being who had tempted him to his ruin. In the earliest versions of the Creation myth—that is, ages before the book of Genesis was written—the reason given for the expulsion of man from the garden of happiness was not his disobedience so much as the fear of the divine beings that he would aspire to the fellowship of the immortals. Those of you who are familiar with Greek mythology will know what a large place this notion occupies therein; it was a favourite idea of the Greek tragedians to ascribe human misfortunes to the "jealousy of the gods." You can easily find traces of this same idea in the story of the Garden of Eden as given in the book of Genesis. I do not mean that the educated men who finally turned it into literature were really influenced by such a belief, but their modification of the original legend still preserves features which show where it came from. Thus we are told that the gods—for the word is in the plural number—warn man that if he eats of the tree of knowledge he will surely die, whereas he does not die. The serpent—that is, wisdom personified—tells him this, and tells him, too, the real reason why the gods are deceiving him; it is because they are afraid he will find out the way to gain immortality and thus become dangerous. This motive is actually confessed in the context by the gods themselves: "And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us (observe the plural pronoun) to know good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life,

and eat, and live for ever "—so they drove out the man. It was for opening man's eyes apparently, that the serpent was cursed, not because it had done anything really wicked. Please understand that I am here speaking of the original sources of the Creation myth, and *not* of the purpose with which it is employed here.

But another element is introduced by regarding the serpent as the personification of evil, the baser or earthly part of man, the degrading animal passions. And this element is just as real as the one we have been examining, although it comes from quite a different source, as I said a few minutes ago. The insight of this later writer here becomes quite remarkable when we remember that this great saying was written thousands of years ago. The thought is this: A day arrives when man becomes aware of a dual nature within him, a divine and an earthly, one in which he shares with the gods, and one which is his in common with the brutes. But he pays a heavy price for his self-knowledge. Henceforth he is at war with himself, the God and the serpent within him fighting for mastery. On the whole, victory rests with the former, and in the end will do so completely, but it will not be a scathless triumph; the God will crush the serpent's head, but the latter will wound the heel that tramples it.

This is quite a felicitous figure to express what every man and woman in this place knows to be absolutely true, and I could not imagine a much better way of putting the case. The whole upward progress of humanity towards the stature of the superman has been a continuous bruising of the

serpent's head; but in the process we have had to suffer; the heel that tramples down the evil has to feel the serpent's fangs. I am not going to enter upon a dissertation as to the reason why such a sinister conflict should ever have been necessary; I have done that before and may do it again; but all I want to do this morning is to show that all true manhood is compelled to fight the battle with the serpent which has given us our knowledge of good and evil, and yet has power to wound and sting. It is better to have the conflict than be without the knowledge. Sad and terrible though human history may be, it becomes sublime when we see it from this point of view. We stand where we do to-day because of those sons of the morning who in all generations past have set their foot firmly on the serpent's head, regardless of the pain and danger to themselves; and we, too, in our turn, are called upon to face the same dread monster on behalf of generations yet unborn. It is ours to

> Tread all the powers of darkness down
> And win the well-fought day.

You will at once recognise the close resemblance between the figure in which this truth is declared in our text, and the hosts of legends about typical heroes of antiquity who stand for the God-like achievements of humanity itself. Such are the infant Hercules strangling the vipers; St. George, the supposed patron saint of England, destroying the dragon—the effigy of which you will see on every gold coin of the realm; and Perseus coming to the rescue of Andromeda, by killing the reptile which

was to devour her. These resemblances are too close to be accidental. They show that the main idea of the age-long conflict between the spiritual and the material, the pure and the foul, the God and the brute, has always been quite naturally symbolised as the struggle of humanity against the serpent. It is not for nothing either that Christian devotion has usually associated our text with the name of Jesus, for on the field of human history that great name sums up all that has ever been attempted or attained in the overthrow of evil and the triumph of good. Of course it may plausibly be contended that Jesus is only an abstraction, an ideal, a creation of the Christian consciousness, and that, if He ever lived at all, the real Jesus must have been far inferior to the estimate formed of Him by posterity.

Perhaps most of you have read Clough's poem, "The Shadow," in which this idea is worked out in form of a satire. He imagines the spirit of Jesus as sitting upon the tomb wherein His body has long since mouldered into dust, and listening with amazement to what the long succession of cunning ecclesiastics and superstitious devotees are saying about Him:

I dreamed a dream: I dreamt that I espied,
Upon a stone that was not rolled aside,
A shadow sit upon a grave—a shade. . . .
"The night is past, the morning is at hand,
And I must in my proper semblance stand,
Appear brief space and vanish—listen, this is true,
I am that Jesus whom they slew." . . .
And shadows dim, I dreamed, the dead apostles came,
And bent their heads for sorrow and for shame—
Sorrow for their great loss, and shame
For what they did in that vain name.

> **And the Shade answered, "What ye say I know not;**
> **But it is true**
> **I am that Jesus whom they slew,**
> **Whom ye have preached, but in what way I know not."**

How far the poet means this view to be taken seriously it would be impossible to say, for the poem was left incomplete, but it represents what a fairly large number of people have feared was the truth about Jesus. He lived. He fought His fight, made His mistakes like other men, and died His death never to rise again except in human imagination. A terrible conclusion this! and one that turns this earth of ours into a charnel-house wherein life sports with death, and noble and ignoble alike become the food of worms. Some time ago a badly written book called *When it was Dark* attempted to show that if it could be proved beyond dispute that Jesus had never conquered death, all the baser passions of humanity would instantly be let loose in a frenzy of despair. That is sheer nonsense, and even worse; but if it be maintained that Jesus never deserved the reverence He has received for nineteen centuries, then we should one and all have to admit that it was the serpent who won in the conflict he provoked, and that everything great and noble which has since been wrought in His name will perish like the baseless fabric of a dream. But it is unthinkable. Jesus cannot be less than His contemporaries believed Him to be; like all great souls, He must be more. Dogmatic systems represent a vast amount of labour and ingenuity; but they can do nothing to commend Jesus to the world, any more than sceptic-

ism can do anything to discredit Him. His credentials are His achievements. I am not interested to prove whether He was sinless or not, and I do not think He was sinless or not, and I do not think He would have been interested in the matter either; the very question is artificial. I do not care three straws about His supposed flawlessness; for, at the best, that sort of test is only negative, and, to be worth anything, a character must be positive. Probably the most contemptible character in this church this morning is the man who is too colourless to have either big virtues or big vices. But I will tell you what I do care about. I care about this fact that this Jesus was an explosive force. His Titanic moral energy was thrown upon the side of weakness and suffering in their conflict with strength and selfishness in alliance with venomous hypocrisy. The reason He has lived is that with all the intensity of His mighty soul He declined all compromise and braved the worst in the service of what He thought to be the true and good. And posterity has vindicated His insight. We have come now to see that the highest kind of life is that in which the unit lives only in and for the whole. Slowly and painfully is the lesson being learned, but when it is learned the triumph of Jesus will be complete. He set his foot upon the serpent's neck, and, although at the moment it seemed strong enough to destroy Him, He has kept it there, and will keep it there until its poisonous breath has no longer any power to blight and injure the human soul. It struck its fangs into Him—of course it did; what else was to be expected? But it could

not destroy him. The turning-point of human history was the execution of Jesus on Calvary, not because it did anything to appease the wrath of God on account of human sin—puerile nonsense!—but because it was the deepest wound ever inflicted by the serpent of human baseness upon the spirit of human nobleness, and because from that moment the God in humanity has shown itself able to crush the serpent's head. The world has never looked back since, no, not even in its darkest hours. The most convinced materialist would surely admit that the issue fought out at Calvary was the issue between truth and falsehood, right and wrong, heaven and hell, and that the former won the day by seeming to lose it.

Here is the same issue before us still. Do not imagine for a moment that it is a simple one. Nothing is easier than to talk about right and wrong, the true and the false, as though they were always easily distinguishable and absolutely different on the outside. They are nothing of the kind. If they were, duty would be a good deal simpler than it is in practice. The difference between right and wrong is only the difference between a higher and a lower self-interest. The self-interest which refuses to consider one's own individual life as having either meaning or value apart from the life of the whole is that for which Jesus stood, and which, in our heart of hearts, every man of us knows and feels to be the highest form of self-expression. It is not a question of the rightness or wrongness of deeds but of attitude, and we know quite well when we are taking the true attitude, although we may

not be quite sure of the wisdom of the particular deed in which the attitude is declared. You are all conscious of that tendency in your nature which makes you wish to score off your neighbour, or take advantage of weakness, or gratify the lusts of the flesh, but perhaps you have never asked yourselves why these things are wrong. They are wrong, because they represent the tendency to indulge the self apart from or at the expense of the common good. The particular way in which this is done is a secondary matter; what matters is that you should succumb to a tendency which, if victorious, would break up human society itself, and make even the survival of individuality impossible. On the other hand, you do not need to be told that, whether your deeds are wise or not, their nobleness consists in the fact that they are the expression of the impulse to find the soul by losing it in the service of the universal life. To put the case in paradoxical fashion—there is no individuality worth the having which does not imply the surrender of individuality; or, to put it another way, no man can find himself until he has discovered that he has no self but mankind. This was the whole secret of the life of Jesus, and this, too, is the divine something which thrills our souls in the presence of anything really great and noble in human character and achievement. When we think of things in this way how inexpressibly silly it seems to talk of this or that human peccadillo as being terrible in the sight of God!

Cardinal Newman once declared that he considered it preferable to undergo ages of the most

inconceivable torment rather than commit one venial sin. Honestly, I do not know what he meant—although I have heard smaller minds talking the same way—unless it were that in the back of his mind was the principle that underlies my text, namely, that a man is either living for the lower or for the higher self, either for the unit or for the whole, either for his own wretched personality or for the eternal God. If the former, the serpent has won without a contest; if the latter it may still have power to strike its fangs into the heel that tramples it, in which case suffering becomes a mark of the triumph of him who endures.

Let me appeal in closing to all who hear me this morning to read their own life truly. I want you to realise that a man may fancy himself a good Christian, and yet be no follower of Jesus. You may have a mean soul, and yet be immaculate in the eyes of the world. You may never in all your life have done a deed of truth that really cost you anything. You may say you are depending on the finished work of Jesus, and have no merits of your own. Quite so; but the finished work of Jesus will have no relation whatever to such a soul as yours, unless it produces merits of your own. If you really belong to His side of things, you will be shedding your blood every day of your life instead of keeping your feet out of the range of the serpent's fangs. On the other hand, there are some men who have been down in the mud a good many times, and who are anything but immaculate, who stand nearer to the heart of things than negative respectability can ever hope to come. I mean the

men who have taken risks and defied odds in a cause or causes in which petty self-interest has been lost sight of. I mean the men who don't bother their heads as to whether they are going to heaven or not, and do not even stop to remind themselves that they are deserving of credit and admiration for having torn the mask from the face of selfishness enthroned as righteousness. Be you aware, fellow-citizens of London and England, that there is hardly any evil worth fighting which unblushingly owns up to what it is; the worst evils of all, and the hardest to overthrow, are those which masquerade as virtues or necessities. The serpent bites hardest when the cause he champions is called good, and the heel that tramples it is called evil. Moreover—and here I am liable to be misunderstood but must take the risk of it—I do not believe Almighty God cares in the least about what is originally termed sinlessness. I wish the word and all it stands for could be relegated to the limbo of forgotten things. It is a positive nuisance. It throws men off the track of the true meaning of life. You may wash all the colour out of a garment and thus render it useless either for beauty or utility, whereas, even with a few stains on it, it may possess both real value and importance. What God requires is greatness of soul, that ineffable quality of mind and heart which enables a man to rise above mean motives and foul desires, and boldly put his foot upon their neck wherever he finds them. It is not even a question of success but of the nobleness of the effort. There are men in this church this morning, I doubt not, so heavily

weighted in their private life, and even in their inmost soul, that they can hardly dare to hope for victory over the dragon they have been fighting for twenty years. Well, be it so, but how hard have you fought? How many scars do you carry? A being with a heart like an iceberg will never understand one whose passions are like a volcano, which may break out at any moment and overwhelm everything in disaster and death. Believe me, your real value to the universe does not consist in your immaculateness, but in the grandeur of your struggle. If you have stood up to your enemy, looked it straight in the eyes, struck it down and trampled it underfoot, you count for far more than if you never had an enemy to face. It does not matter so very much that it is still writhing alive beneath your feet and has power to draw your life-blood, for that is not the last word. If I were to tell you that believing something about the fight which Jesus fought will give your enemy its death-blow I should tell you a lie; you will have to deal that blow yourself, but the strength that deals it is the strength of God. But you need never be afraid of the result. If Calvary could not kill Jesus, neither will evil destroy you. "Fear not them which kill the body," and after that have no more that they can do. But take care that nothing shall ever be allowed to kill that in you which is likest God—neither sorrow, calamity, temptation, nor any one of the myriad forces which are the serpent's fangs in the flesh of Christ.

Not a blow is wasted, however much it may seem to be so. The good fight of faith is that in which

every son of God is contending for mastery against his own baser self, and against everything that would stifle the soul of the race. And, in the long run, there can be no more doubt about the issue than about the fact that there is a sun in heaven which will presently turn winter darkness into summer splendour. The conflict is ours; the victory is God's.

Because of death hold not thy life too cheap;
Plan for the years—found broad and strong—aim high;
Nobly to fail is more than victory
Over unworthy foes; mourn not nor weep,
One span of life thou hast 'twixt deep and deep.
Be all thy care to fill it gloriously;
Live even as if thou knew'st thou could'st not die.
This day is short—there will be years for sleep.

Therefore work thou while it is called to-day,
And let the night of the night's things take care.
By those strong souls who leave our earth more fair
With their strenuous service unto all for aye
I charge thee work, and let not death dismay,
Nor the shadow of death, but greatly hope and dare.

IV

JACOB'S WRESTLING

"And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day."—GEN. xxxii. 24.

IN approaching the subject indicated in our text I am conscious of a certain amount of difficulty arising from the fact that this passage has been preached upon so often that it has come to acquire a significance for the Christian mind which no one wishes to have disturbed. Most people are impatient of anything which sounds like criticism of an accepted view of any subject—religious, literary, social, or political. And yet without such criticism we cannot possibly arrive at definite knowledge of the sources of our beliefs or the true strength of our convictions.

You are all aware, no doubt, of the way in which this story of Jacob's wrestling with the angel has been made use of in Christian thought in the immediate past. Take our own hymn book, for instance, and notice the way in which reference is made to the episode in Charles Wesley's well-known hymn.

Come, O Thou Traveller unknown,
Whom still I hold, but cannot see,
My company before is gone,
And I am left alone with Thee;

With thee all night I mean to stay,
And wrestle till the break of day.

The very phrase, "wrestling with God in prayer," is derived from the language of our text, and implies that what Jacob is supposed to have done in the midnight experience described in this chapter we must do if we are in earnest about spiritual blessing. The assumption in most minds appears to be that Jacob's view of the nature of God was the same as ours, and that when he was wrestling he was really praying with all his might. Robertson, of Brighton, has a great sermon on the subject, in which this interpretation of the story is taken for granted all the way through, and a valuable spiritual lesson deduced therefrom. Only a month ago I heard a sermon myself in which the same thing was not only taken for granted but plainly stated by the preacher, and a very good sermon it was too. In thus pointing out the homiletical use to which this ancient story has been put, I am very far from wishing to suggest that the results have not been good and useful in their place, but what I wish to insist upon is that in the light of modern biblical scholarship no such interpretation is warranted. We do not lose anything by knowing this. We never do lose anything by facing the truth, and to do so in this instance will certainly repay us.

Observe, then, to begin with, how obscure is the reference to Jacob's adversary. Our text says that "there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." Was this man God? If so, how anthropomorphic the whole story becomes! We should not venture to use such language about the

relations of man and God to-day. In what way did Jacob enter into conflict with this being? Was it only—as we are so often told—a spiritual conflict provoked by Jacob's fear of Esau and his sense that the punishment of his former sin seemed now to be descending upon him? If so, what about the strained thigh upon which the patriarch halted during the remainder of his march? If this wrestle was really only an agonising prayer for forgiveness and help, why was it that Jacob had to ask the name of his antagonist? Where are the signs of contrition in Jacob's demeanour? Does the narrative say that he was sorry on account of his sins? There is no suggestion of the kind. Then, again, observe the curious form of statement: "And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh." If this were indeed the Divine Being there would be no need for such a discovery. According to the narrative, Jacob's antagonist was unable to overcome him even when he had sprained his limb, and the request: "Let me go, for the day breaketh," was a confession that they were fairly well matched. How does this fit in with the view that the whole experience was spiritual, and presented in allegorical form? You see, therefore, that even as the account stands it presents difficulties which the ordinary explanation does not solve.

The matter becomes simpler when looked at in the light of what modern biblical scholarship is saying about the true significance of all these patriarchal stories in the book of Genesis. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are names which stand not

only for real individuals, but also for tribes. In Old Testament literature the name Jacob is often applied to the whole Israelitish nation, as, for example, in Isaiah xli: "Thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend." The farther we get back in Israelitish history the more probable does it appear that in such legends as the one which contains our text we have a pictorial account of a crisis in the affairs of the tribe or tribes which formed the nucleus of the nation of after days. In this chapter we have a hint of the age-long struggle between Israelites and Edomites, that is, between Jacob and Esau. Neither of these two ever attained to great political importance or occupied a very large territory; but they were rivals, and in the end Israel succeeded in showing herself stronger than Edom, although Edom seems to have been the older people. This is the meaning of the prophecy said to have been given to Rebekah: "The elder shall serve the younger." Here in the thirty-second chapter we have an account of the passage of the tribe of Jacob through a settled portion of Edomite territory. The nomads are fiercely opposed by the inhabitants, who make a night attack upon them, and a sharp conflict follows, in which the Jacobites (if you will allow that word) succeed in beating off their assailants, but only with considerable loss to themselves. Read the story again from this point of view, and see how plain everything becomes. Jacob—for so we may call the patriarchal leader of these Bedouins—finds his following in great danger from an attack in the

rear. He knows he is in Edomite territory, but he does not even know the name of the tribe which is attacking him. Forthwith he sends his women and children across the ford Jabbok and prepares to defend the passage with his whole force of available fighting men. How fierce the conflict must have been is evidenced by the fact that daylight shone upon a drawn battle, and that the Jacobites were permitted to cross the ford unpursued, carrying their wounded as they went. The rest of the march would have to be a slow one in consequence of the losses which had been sustained. This is what is meant by the straining of the thigh. When Edom, or that portion of Edom which commenced the assault, found that they prevailed not against Israel, they tried to turn his flank, with the result that the Jacobites were severely mauled in the encounter, although they held their own until daybreak. "And the sun rose upon him as he passed over Penuel, and he halted upon his thigh." Jacob had been hard hit, but the danger was not yet over. There were Edomites in front as well as behind, and so the Jacobites found it expedient to send on a valuable present to the head of the Edomite tribes in the hope of gaining his favour, which they succeeded in doing, with the result that in the rest of their passage through the country they were unmolested.

Where, then, does the Divine Being come in, and what is the meaning of the blessing which Jacob is stated to have obtained? Well, we have to recognise that at the time to which this account refers, these people believed in many gods.

Jehovah, the God of Israel, who in process of time came to be thought of as the God of all the nations upon earth, was originally regarded as only the tribal deity; He was the God of Israel, but not the God of Edom. After the midnight conflict, already described, the Edomites recognised the prowess of the God of Israel, and were willing to make terms with His worshippers. They asked for a truce—"Let me go, for the day breaketh"—and the result was an understanding which was supposed to be entered into with the sanction of Israel's God, the testimony of the Edomites being: "Thou hast had power with God"—the word used for God is a very general term: "Thou hast had power with a Divine One"—"and therefore thou shalt prevail against men." The name of the Edomite deity is not given, but the power of Jacob's God is recognised. Both parties apparently thought that, but for Divine help, the Jacobites could not have held their own in the midnight assault. Hence their new name—Israel, that is, God's struggler, God's warrior, God's victor. The next day, when the Edomites gathered in still greater force, the truce was cemented, and amicable feelings took the place of hostile ones for the time being. You thus see that we have here a piece of prehistoric tradition, but it describes an actual event in the early life of the people of Israel, and what took place at that time was deemed so important that it became a part of the religious treasure of Israel ages after.

This examination of a primitive story is confirmed by what we know of the habits and customs of nomadic tribes everywhere. It is quite a mistake

to read into it the views and feelings of a later time and a widely different civilisation. The story is interesting from many points of view, but it will not bear the construction which is commonly put upon it in our hymns and sermons.

Well, then, some one will say, of what use is it to us? What possible help or inspiration can there be in this strangely worded description of the midnight conflict of two small, half-civilised tribes ages and ages ago? I think I can tell you. In the first place, I want you to recognise that the men who first wrote down this story—long after the event to which it alludes—were deeply religious men who believed with all their hearts in the directing wisdom of God as manifested in their own national history. Looking back upon special turning points, they were able to discern something of what God's purpose must have been at the time, although it was not evident until perhaps long after the crisis was over. This was the way, therefore, in which these later writers came to regard the popular tradition concerning the early conflict with Edom. They would say to themselves: "God was really there. Had the result been different from what it was, had the following of Jacob been overthrown, all subsequent history would have been different too. Prayer to the God of Israel did make a difference; it nerved men's arms and strengthened their hearts in such a way that although their numbers were few they became invincible. The issue seemed small, but it was not small; there is nothing small to God."

This is just where this ancient story with its

religious flavour touches me. There is indeed nothing small to God, and at once I feel myself to be in close psychological and spiritual sympathy with the little group of Jacobites who called upon their God and fought their fight so bravely for their women and children in the midst of thick darkness in a hostile country in ages long gone by. We are not so very different from them, after all; fundamentally their problems are ours, and our means of solving them are the same as theirs. In every midnight conflict in which faith and courage go hand in hand, I see exactly the same situation as that set forth in this chapter, although the externals may be utterly different. Men have always been praying and fighting, and they will go on praying and fighting to the end of time. The present grows out of the past; the praying and fighting of earlier days have made possible the world of to-day, and the praying and fighting which you and I are now compelled to do are making possible the brighter world of to-morrow, and God is in it all from first to last. It is not my purpose this morning to enter into the question as to why there should have to be conflict at all; sometimes I think I can see the reason why; but at present my only object is to show that where conflict is God is, and the outcome of the conflict depends upon the clearness with which we recognise that fact and act accordingly.

Now here is where a further difficulty emerges in connection with our subject:—In actual everyday life it is not always your man of strongly marked religious faith who carries all before him, and it

would not be a good thing if it were so. In Morocco, for example, at this moment a kind of holy war is being preached against the European invader, but we all know it will be preached in vain; in spite of the splendid courage and self-devotion of the Moors, French artillery will make short work of their hopes. Besides, whose God is to win? In the conflict to which our text refers Israel had a God and Edom had a god, and one side was just as determined as the other; was God's interest upon one side only? Prayers were offered on both sides during the Boer war, and yet there are plenty of people still living who would say that the wrong side won, after all; how is this? Then, if we leave bloodshed alone, and come to the equally cruel warfare imposed by the prevailing conditions in modern industrial life, does the principle hold good that the man of strong religious faith always comes out on top? Does not experience teach us that it is the man with the most capital and the greatest amount of business shrewdness who does that? Apparently, too, he is all the more likely to succeed if he is not too heavily burdened with conscientious scruples; the man who pays heed to his conscience often seems to be actually at a disadvantage in comparison with his rivals. Many and many a midnight conflict has had to be gone through, the only outward result of which has been worldly failure and material ruin to the good and upright man.

I fully realise all this, and I realise, too, the apparent absurdity of attempting to deduce any principle of guidance for modern action from this

story of the savage conflict of two small bodies of tribesmen in an Eastern country three millenniums ago; one might as well try, on the face of it, to deduce a spiritual principle from an engagement between Soudanese dervishes and Abyssinian riflemen to-day.

All the same, I emphatically affirm that all moral advance in the affairs of men is made by the definite recognition of the presence of God in any given crisis, in which case the real victory may rest with him who suffers the apparent defeat. He may do more than halt upon his thigh as he passes over Penuel, he may fall upon the field; but he is the servant of God and the real victor in the age-long conflict of which good is the goal: "The one far-off divine event to which the whole creation moves." But when I speak of God I mean much more than a name or even a person. When I speak of God I mean the sum of all human excellence and the goal of all true human aspiration. I believe that the strongest man on earth is the man who recognises God as the being who includes all that we mean by personal, and infinitely more; as well as all that we mean by the true, the beautiful and the good, and infinitely more. We can only apprehend and express God up to the limit of our present capacity, but this we ought to do, and ought never to rest content with less. Our idea of God to-day, thanks to Jesus, is immeasurably higher than that of the tribesmen whose battle suggested our text, but perhaps we are not as true to it. It is possible for a man to name the name of God with the utmost reverence, and at the same

time to be serving a moral standard which he knows is not the highest. On the other hand, a man may say little about God, but may be possessed by a moral passion which renders it impossible for him to be silent in the presence of a public or private wrong; which of these is nearer to the reality of things? There can hardly be any doubt about the answer.

The truth, then, illustrated in our text is this. In the call of duty we must learn to hear the voice of God.

We have no means for discerning the will of God otherwise than by obeying that which we feel to be highest and truest in ourselves. God is the supreme reality of all being, and that reality can only find expression in the truth and faithfulness of individual men. In any given crisis the truest service we can render to God is to do our best for the cause to which we stand committed, and leave results to Him. There never can be much question as to what the cause is which has the greatest claim upon us at any one time. According to our text, the cause of the followers of Jacob was the safety of the women and children; they did not see any farther than that; they did not know, and could not know, that they were making history, and that a nation would come into being as a consequence of that one night's work. Neither could they have dreamed that they were preparing the foundations of a world religion, and making a pathway along which would come the world's Redeemer; small events are the hinges upon which great ones turn. What they did then we have to do now, and we

can see no farther than they. In that midnight battle, humanly speaking, Israel's mighty men were fighting not only for their own wives and little ones, but for the Christ that was to be. In our hours of stress and danger, when all our moral resources are strained to the uttermost, we are doing just the same when we are faithful to the best we can see, and the victory our courage and faith enable us to win is therefore greater than we know—nay, even apparent defeat must mean a realisation of God's purpose, wider and deeper than at present we have eyes to see.

To some extent there may even seem to be a conflict of ideals involved, and it may be no easy matter to make our choice. Readers of the Bhaghavad Gita will remember the perplexity in which Prince Arjuna found himself, and the advice which the god Krishna gave him. Arjuna was obliged to take part in a civil war, in which to join either side meant shedding the blood of his kinsmen. While he was in great trouble of mind about this, Krishna came to him disguised as a charioteer, and bade him choose without hesitation the side on which he could most freely serve, leaving the outcome in the hands of God. This counsel is similar to that given by the Jesuit in *John Inglesant:* "It matters much less what side you choose in a time of storm and conflict than that you should make the best choice open to you at the moment, and serve as bravely and faithfully as ever you can." Surely there is a great truth in this. None of us can fully understand either the genesis or the issue of the particular crisis in which our fortunes happen to be involved, but

we can quite well understand that we have no business to trifle with it, and that there is a place marked out for us somewhere in connection with it. To side with Israel in resisting Edom may in the long run be of more service even to Edom than that we should shirk the issue and do nothing at all. In the present education struggle, for instance, it were better to be either Lord Hugh Cecil or Dr. Clifford than to be utterly without interest in the grand result of the controversy in which those two Christian patriots are so sharply opposed.

Suffer me now to press this truth home upon your individual experience. What man is there among you who has not known his hour of midnight conflict? And what true man is there who would not acknowledge that the sternest part of that conflict arose from the fact that he was conscious of being the stay of other lives than his own? Go to the bottom of any trouble, and you will find that it has a social significance; we suffer individually just because we are bound up together. If any of you business men have ever passed a sleepless night on account of the danger of possible loss and ruin, it has not been because you feared the future on your own account: that would be a comparatively small matter. No, what troubled you was just what troubled the men whose midnight conflict made my text possible—the weaker lives on the further side of the ford where you stood at bay, face to face with the foe. Is not the situation strikingly similar? After all, you see, the motives of human action, and the spring of human suffering, are much the same now as they were then. I dare

say some of you spent some anxious hours last night thinking over your worldly prospects, with no one to know your thoughts but God. I dare say there are some of you in the City Temple who are doing so at this very moment. No one knows your anxieties, or sees the inside of your trouble, but yourself and God. As far as you can you have kept it even from those most concerned. Sometimes in such circumstances the happy laughter of little children falls sadly upon a burdened father's heart. Those of you who know what it is to sit by the fireside in a loving home, with your solitary load of care pressing heavily upon your thoughts, will know what I mean.

In all such cases there is but one thing to be done, and that is to play the man. Trust in God and wait for the morning. It cannot be that, if there are right and justice at the heart of things, God has forgotten the children of His own being. Your own little bit of duty means more than you can at present see, not only to yourself, or to that little circle you care for, but to us, to all mankind, and to the heaven you cannot see. Your duty cannot be delegated to anybody else; you are wanted in the field—you, and nobody else will do. You may be hard hit before you have done with it, but history teaches us one glorious lesson. It was because of that lesson that my text was ever written—that is, that faith informed by love never is worsted in the long run. If it could be, there would be no God. Read the witness of saints and seers for a thousand years of Christian history along which we are privileged to look, and you

will find that testimony. Jesus came to His ford Jabbok when He reached Gethsemane; He was alone then and fighting for mankind, not for His own hand. In the immediate result it seemed as though the enemy had crushed him beyond recovery, but there was God to be reckoned with, and therefore to-day Jesus, to our devotion, is King of kings and Lord of lords. Wherefore, seeing we are compassed about by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the selfishness and cowardice that do so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus.

Hear me, then, you who stand alone at midnight, guarding your ford Jabbok, with the weaker lives in the rear. The issue is greater than you know, but it could not be simpler. You have to do just what Jesus did, and wait the result without fear. It is not chance that rules the universe, but a divine wisdom that never makes a mistake. It is not selfishness that is really master, even in this world, though it sometimes seems to be so, but a divine love that cannot be hindered or destroyed. Trust in that divine wisdom can never be put to shame, and the service of that divine love will issue in gladness of heart to the worker, and more and more abundant life and blessing to all mankind.

V

THE INNER VOICE

"*After the fire a still small voice.*"—1 KINGS xix. 12.

THERE is one thing upon which all serious-minded people are agreed, whether their theology be old or new, namely, that there is no book to match the Bible in knowledge of the human heart in relation to God. The greater the light thrown upon it by modern scholarship, the more clearly do we perceive this to be the case: criticism and historical research have done nothing to diminish the value of the written word—on the contrary, they have in some cases added enormously to our perception of its spiritual worth. The story of Elijah is a very good example of this. The work of a succession of eminent scholars and archæologists has placed us in possession of a number of facts which throw considerable light upon the life and work of this great man and enable us to realise the inwardness of the legends associated with his name. Amongst these legends perhaps the most beautiful is the one whence our text is taken. Here we see the austere prophet, fleeing for his life, and in great depression of spirit, engaged in solitary communion with God and listening to the divine voice bidding him undertake the last act in his striking

and stormy career. I desire this morning, if I can, to make clear to you something of what was taking place in the great soul of Elijah at this time, and what had led up to it. I hope you will find something in it that will help you in to-day's task, and perhaps in to-day's trouble. At any rate, I think you will see that in essentials human nature and human problems have not changed so very much since Elijah's day.

What, then, was the matter in the kingdom of Israel at this time? Well, on the face of it, the issue for which Elijah contended so manfully throughout his public life was whether Jehovah or Baal should be the God of Israel. This was not quite the case, however. It was far more than a question of names. The real issue was between Puritanism and Hedonism—between an ideal of national righteousness and the sensual rites of nature worship. Now this was no mere triviality; it was deep and vital. Jehovah was not only the national God of Israel, but the God of purity, justice, and simplicity of life. It was this which distinguished Him most from the deities of surrounding nations. You cannot read the Old Testament without seeing that at certain periods Jehovah was thought of as a grim and terrible God, but He never was the God of bestiality and self-indulgence. Better the grim and terrible than the God whose service is associated with degrading and filthy exercise of animal passion. Under King Ahab the worship of Jehovah had not been discontinued, but that of foreign deities had been introduced alongside of it—a far more serious mis-

chief than if the ancient religion had been disavowed altogether. Jehovah now became one God among many. The various Baals, as they were called—that is, simply " deities "—were worshipped with riotous, drunken orgies of the most shameful character, while the altars of Jehovah, though not entirely destroyed, were practically neglected. You see, therefore, that here was a moral issue of the first importance. Elijah was not merely fighting for a name, but for an ideal. He stood for simplicity of life, cleanness and continence, civic and social justice. All these were in danger, owing to the introduction of foreign cults and customs. The courts and camps were filled with lewd women, who were able to pervert justice and turn society into a brothel. The story of Naboth's vineyard is a sufficient illustration of what was going on. The corruption of all the higher ranks of society at this time led to the spoliation of the poor and weak, and a general deterioration of manners which would in the end have resulted in the break-up of the State. It was to counteract this that Elijah appeared, full of fiery zeal and courage, a man of tremendous moral force. Looking beneath the letter of the few fragmentary accounts we possess concerning him, we can see that he must have been an object of great dread to the reigning house. There is one most illuminating incident told in 1 Kings xviii, which gives us an insight into the kind of man he was. It appears that Queen Jezebel had massacred some hundreds of the prophets of Jehovah. A few of them, however, had been saved by the action of Obadiah, the steward of the royal house-

hold, who had hidden them in a cave and fed them with bread and water. A great drought shortly afterwards fell upon the land. Obadiah was sent by King Ahab to try to find some pasture for the perishing horses and cattle, and at the same time to arrest Elijah, if possible. On the way he met the prophet, who bade him go back and tell the king that he was coming to speak to him of his own accord. Poor Obadiah was afraid to tell Ahab this.

And he said, "What have I sinned, that thou wouldst deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me? As the Lord thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee. . . . And so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me . . ." And Elijah said, "As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself unto him to-day." So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him; and Ahab went to meet Elijah. And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim."

Here you have at a glance the character of the man—fearless, indomitable, stern even to ruthlessness; full of self-forgetful zeal for his country and his God. The weak and wicked monarch quailed in his mighty presence, so that for a moment he actually agreed to his demand for a trial of strength between Baal and Jehovah. Then follows the his-

toric scene on Carmel, in which the grand, solitary, majestic figure of Elijah was pitted against four hundred and fifty priests of Baal. We cannot be sure of what actually took place, but the immediate result was a reaction in favour of Jehovah and a wholesale massacre of the priests of Baal. Then comes a counter-reaction. Within a few hours this hitherto dauntless prophet and patriot is in full flight before the soldiers of Jezebel, and seeks shelter in the fastnesses of Mount Horeb. His massive soul is in the deepest despondency; his bloody triumph had been short-lived; all his work is failure once more. So he prays for death, not at the hand of his enemies, but at the hand of God. The scene that follows is one of the most remarkable pieces of word-painting in the whole Bible. As the sorrowful prophet repeats over and over again to himself the reason for his presence there—"I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: For the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away"—a terrifying storm breaks out, and Elijah takes his stand upon an eminence to watch it. Probably it was night, when the effect would be even more sublime than by day. Rocks were torn from their foundations by the fury of the tempest, aided by a volcanic eruption and succeeded by a conflagration. It was all in keeping with the mood of Elijah's storm-tossed soul, and yet it must have made him feel how puny he was in the presence of such titanic forces. He remembered that in ages long

before God was said to have appeared to His people on this very mountain veiled in cloud and flame. He remembered that these had been looked upon as tokens of the divine majesty, and had struck dread into the heart of Israel. Yet here was the same spectacle with no one to view it but himself. Hour after hour passed on; wind, earthquake, and fire succeeded each other as the solitary watcher continued to gaze. Then morning dawned; the violence of the elements died away; the sun rose upon a scene of quietness and peace, and the tumult in Elijah's soul subsided likewise. He began to realise that he had been too self-conscious, too tempestuous, and that his very despair was egotistic. Who was he to champion the King of kings? Could not the mighty Being to whose thunders he had just listened, and whose hand could pluck mountains from their base and shatter them in pieces, watch over and save His people Israel? Was his own stormy zeal in the service of God any more productive than this tempest of a night? Did God need one more than the other for the manifestation of Himself? Where was God now? Was He to be looked for in the destructive effects of earthquake, wind, and fire? Not so. God was speaking in the new quietness that had taken possession of the soul of His servant. The still small voice was telling him that, after all, the tempest of Carmel had not been necessary, the massacre of priests had not advanced the cause of righteousness a single jot. Even Elijah himself was not necessary. There was a silent Israel that had never bowed the knee to Baal; there were even

other witnesses and other workers who should carry on and complete what Elijah had begun. It was not in catastrophic events, whether in nature or in human society, that God was most clearly revealed, but in the quiet uprising of purer desires and nobler feelings in the hearts of men—"Not by might nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

If ever I came across a piece of genuine spiritual history I think I have found it here. This story is a great prose poem, giving me insight into the workings of God in the human soul. It makes Elijah live for me. Here is no dim, titanic figure, half-hidden by the mists of vast antiquity, but a brave, struggling, suffering brother-man. I can enter into his feelings, sympathise with his distresses, and even understand the peace that came to him after that lonely night's vigil on Horeb. Yes, I love Elijah, for in him I see myself. I see you too. And I see every man who has ever had anything to do for God and lost his true perspective by over-absorption in the immediate and the near outside the soul.

There is one mistake that servants of truth are always making, and that is judging by appearances. We look too much to externals, dwell too much upon the circumference and too little at the centre of things. In proportion to our eagerness and self-devotion is our tendency to exaggerate our own importance to the cause of God and to waste time in looking for visible results of our activity. There is danger, of course, in the other extreme, but it is not so great a danger as the one we are

discussing. We belong to a vigorous race and a feverish age. We are always in a turmoil of effort, and are prodigal of life and energy. In fact, we tend to despise the contemplative and to urge men to look for salvation in toilsome and tumultuous effort rather than in quiescence and solemn waiting upon God. I am quite sure I am right in saying that there are some of you busy men before me who would be inclined to discount such spiritual counsels as would tend to draw your mind away even for a moment from the concrete and the practical. What you want, you would tell me, is such teaching as would help to brace your moral energies and render you strong and assured in your service for the Kingdom of God. You are suspicious, and rightly suspicious, of all mere religiosity, all preaching and praying that issues in subjectivity and sentimentality and withdraws the soul from active sympathy with human concerns. You would be quite right in contending that Christianity has suffered from this kind of thing more than from anything else, and that even today people contrive to reduce their religious life to a series of agreeable emotions with little or no practical outcome in the betterment of human life. You would tell me that in business the man who is most fervent in his Christian devotion is no more generous and no more trustworthy than any one else—as often as not he is rather less so. Perhaps, therefore, when you come to the City Temple you do so because you feel that here, at least, the moral imperative is kept well to the fore and the consciousness of the world's need never lost sight of in

abstract propositions about the communion of the soul with God apart altogether from the well-being of man.

I admit all this. But has there never been a time in your experience when you have grown baffled and weary with the greatness of your tasks and the smallness of your success with them? Have you never felt that you craved something besides the feeling that what you were doing was worth doing and that you would prevail in the end? Have you never had your hours of deep discouragement—yes, and your seasons of defeat —in which you questioned with yourself whether what you were doing was worth doing after all? Like Elijah, perhaps, you have played the man and done it well. You have confronted King Ahab in the full consciousness of rectitude and sincerity of purpose. You have even had your Mount Carmel, your dramatic stand for righteousness, and your hard-won, stormy triumph. You fixed your eye upon a certain goal and got there. You have gained your point in some fiercely contested conflict of interests in which you have managed to see justice done. You have unmasked some piece of cruel humbug or put to silence some clamorous evil. You have put your whole soul into the cause, whatever it may be, which you felt to be yours, and your very intensity and self-forgetful zeal have gained you a temporary victory. Then follows the hour of disillusionment. No sooner have you driven an evil out by one door than it returns by another. The victory you thought was going to do everything turns out to

have done nothing; things are no better than they were before—worse, perhaps.

> It must oft fall out
> That one whose labour perfects any work
> Shall rise from it with eye so worn that he,
> Of all men, least can measure the extent
> Of what he has accomplished.

But can any one else measure it either? Very seldom—if ever. The world's greatest crises usually take place without the actors therein being aware of the fact. Occasionally some outstanding genius flings his defiance in the face of his fellows and appeals to posterity, but as a rule neither the worker nor the onlookers appreciate the true significance of what is being done. And there is good reason for this. The truth is that nothing which takes place in this world of time and sense really has value in itself; it only has value in relation to eternity. It is not what you do that matters, but what it does in you. Judging by appearances is therefore a false and foolish proceeding in which no man should ever indulge. Success or failure can never be measured in terms of the outward and visible, but only of the inward and spiritual. This is the sense in which we may say every true Christian has to renounce the world. You can do no other if you want to save it or to save your own soul. It is so natural to look for God in the catastrophic and tremendous, whereas these are no more than the froth blown up on the cliffs from the advancing tide that is gradually but surely wearing away their foundations. The Napoleons and Cæsars of history bulk very large on the field of

human interest. How much do they count for in reality? They are not forces in themselves, but only the instruments of forces. They mean no more in the spiritual universe than a falling rock or a blade of grass. What seems great to us may be but trivial when seen from the side of God's purpose for and in humanity. Have we ever had a glimpse as to what that purpose is? Most assuredly. The life of Jesus has not been lived in vain, for it has summed up and brought to a focus all the stumbling endeavours of prophets and saints in ages past in showing us that the ultimate goal of human achievement is to be the realisation of a fellowship of love. Now, measured from this standpoint, what is great and what is small? That alone is great which means the release of higher motives and purer aims than can find opportunity in the bondage of material limitation. The colossal figures on the field of human history are generally only the scavengers of heaven; God's greatest servants are those who have put the most love into their work, and therefore thrust their own personality farthest into the background. What renders an action of value to God is not its dramatic power, but its spiritual quality; the Lord is not in the earthquake, wind, and fire, but in the still small voice. To become discouraged in any good work is not only to forget this, but to be in danger of committing the sacrilege of mixing up our own individual fortunes with the cause of God, and making the latter serve the former. Elijah thought that when he had butchered the priests of Baal he had gained the end for which he had striven. Not

at all. The people who helped him to do it would have butchered him too the very next day; they were not morally one whit better for the deed of blood. They had not been converted to the austere ideal of the prophet; they had but swung to the stronger side. So it is to-day. A general election takes place in 1906, in which the nation declares—or so many people think—for soberness and righteousness. Within a few short months we get a Peckham contest, in which the forces of hell seem to run riot and good men mourn that base motives, cynically avowed, have still such enormous power with the British electorate. Is it, then, really true that a verdict at the polls represents a great moral advance or its contrary, a moral set-back? Yes, perhaps to some degree it does, but not to the extent that is commonly understood. The real victory won by Elijah at Carmel was not the slaughter of his foes, but the moral intensity and self-devotion which had made the meeting on Carmel possible. No smaller man could have done it; no meaner motive than unselfish zeal for Israel and Israel's God could have impressed the people so far that they were even willing to listen to him. What happened on Carmel was of far less moment than what had impressed the heart of Israel during the years preceding in which Elijah had been uttering his apparently fruitless protest against the national vice and shame. It had been the still small voice all the time, the divine voice that spoke in the stirring conscience of the common people.

And it can never be different. What you actually see as the result of your labour matters little,

if at all; what does matter is what you have put into the work. It is that which tells, not the human recognition it has won, nor the visible success achieved. In twenty years from now—in fifty at the most—all the outward part of what you are doing now will have perished. There are some kinds of work in which the visible result of your labours may last a little longer, but your part in it will be forgotten as soon as you pass away. You may even be one of the small company whose names are immortalised in the reverence of posterity because of their achievements, but what satisfaction will that give you? No; all that is worth thinking about in the task which God has put into your hand to-day is the motive with which you do it. That is a spiritual thing, and, being spiritual, its full equivalent will be yours when all its material embodiment has crumbled into dust. We are like the toilers in the stokehole of a ship—we have our eye on the machinery all the time, without feeling or realising that our real work is to carry something beautiful to another shore. We are like the men who work in darkness in the bowels of the earth to send up light and warmth to a world above. I am a convinced and earnest Socialist, but I am not such a fool as to imagine that Socialism can be dumped on human nature from without; it has to be uttered from within. As Mrs. Philip Snowden says, the first and greatest work in this direction is the socialising of men and women, the socialising of thought and feeling; we have to get people to cease thinking in units. Killing the priests of Baal will never save society. I

do not value service for the poor merely because it may make their life a little happier here. That is worth something, to be sure, and it is a truly spiritual work; but there is something farther and greater, and that is that with the removal of the fetters of ignorance and materialism you are doing something to awaken the God within the emancipated soul. It is worth something to close public-houses in the streets, but it is worth more to close them in the hearts of men. You may have many a hard fight before you succeed in doing much for the oppressed and downtrodden—it takes such a vast amount of energy to achieve even a small result—but the real effect is the spiritual equivalent of the consecration with which you have wrought. You may need the fire—even the earthquake sometimes—but the real purpose of all worthy effort is to enable men to hear the still small voice that tells of the love that never dies.

You can hear that voice now if you will, and you can learn to listen for it amid the roar and tumult of every-day human affairs. For that voice is the voice of Christ, the deeper Man, the God-Man who dwells within us all, and whom nothing can ever destroy. When we have crossed to the other side of the gulf that separates seen from unseen we shall find that nothing has ever mattered except faithfulness to that voice. Place does not matter —one might gain all the glory of the world and yet be a stranger to one's own soul; fame and station count for nothing in that mysterious beyond towards which we are all hastening; the only possession we can carry there is what we are. Can

we not live now as though our hearts were set only upon eternal values? Can we not do with our lives now what we would do if we knew for certain that nothing shall live but love? Can we not gaze calmly at the destructive effect of earthquake, wind and fire, when we know that the still small voice is whispering, Well done, good and faithful servant? Above all, we shall not be tempted to think that success or failure depend in the least upon what the world can see.

Loud mockers in the roaring street
  Say Christ is crucified again:
Twice pierced His gospel-bearing feet,
  Twice broken His great heart in vain.
    I hear, and to myself I smile,
    For Christ talks with me all the while.

. . . . . .

No more unto the stubborn heart
  With gentle knocking shall He plead,
No more the mystic pity start,
  For Christ twice dead is dead indeed.
    So in the street I hear men say,
    Yet Christ is with me all the day.

VI

THE ROCK AND THE PIT

"Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock whence ye were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye were digged."—ISAIAH li. 1.

THIS vivid piece of imagery belongs to that section of the book of Isaiah which is concerned mainly with the idea of the "suffering servant of God." It is one of the grandest parts of the whole Bible, and yet its exegesis presents not a few difficulties. You are all aware that this interesting book falls into two main divisions. The first (chaps. i. to xxxix.) dates from about the last quarter of the eighth century B.C., and represents the work of the great prophet Isaiah, whose name it bears. There are a few isolated passages in it which belong to a later age, and these are comparatively easy to trace. But when we come to the second half of the book the case is different. Chapter xl. opens with a new note and introduces us to a new author, the second Isaiah, as he is called, the great prophet of the exile, whose work it was to herald the restoration. There is no mistaking the splendid ring of this man's message beginning with the words, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God." This utterance

can only date from the middle of the sixth century B.C., and deals with the return from Babylon. But when we go on to read the later chapters, the question sometimes arises whether we are listening to the same speaker dealing with the same set of circumstances, or whether the scene has shifted again. The probability is that we have several voices in the latter part of the book of Isaiah, and that the sections about the suffering servant are all the work of one man. Whether this man was the same as the one who gave us the inspiring fortieth chapter we cannot tell, but it is fairly certain that he now writes in Jerusalem instead of Babylon. There are some passages in which he seems to speak of the exodus from Babylon as yet to take place, whereas in others he describes the returned exiles as being once more at home on Mount Zion. This is what makes the exegesis difficult; we are not always sure as to whether Babylon or Jerusalem is the scene of the allusion, and to know which is meant would occasionally make the meaning clearer. It is easy to see why, while the Jews were preparing to go forth from their house of bondage in the pagan city, their mood would be one of hope and joy. They would picture the return to their distant highland home in the most gorgeous colours, and would expect to resume their national life and worship as though there were no difficulties in the way. But the reality was far different from this dream. When they returned home it was only to find Jerusalem a waste, and the remnant of her population poor, degraded, and half-paganised. We have to remember that it was the best of the

Jewish population which had been carried away into captivity many years before; it was the weaker elements that had been left behind. Picture the disappointment of the emancipated prisoners when they found the homeland a desert and all their sacred places lying in ruins. They were so incensed by the low *morale* of their kinsmen who dwelt among these ruins that they refused to have much to do with them, and vigorously repudiated all those who had contracted foreign alliances or proved untrue to their faith.

This was their first disillusionment—the moral deterioration of their countrymen. They had many more to face. Their Persian deliverers had given them no effective protection against their foes, such as the Edomites and other surrounding peoples, who now gathered against them, and strove to prevent the re-erection of the walls of Jerusalem, as well as the Temple. For this interesting chapter of Jewish history read the books of Ezra and Nehemiah; these serve to show how the people were feeling at this discouraging time. They had come home full of enthusiasm, believing that all their ancient glories were immediately to be restored. When they saw how things really were they lost heart, and it was not until many years after the restoration that any progress was made with the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Perhaps it is this period of depression to which our text refers. I wish we knew for certain, for, as you can immediately realise, the fact would make some difference to the bearing of the exhortation. If these words were uttered in Babylon, just before the Jews started for

home, they would be spoken to men rejoicing in their new-found freedom and cherishing the most glowing anticipations as to the future. If this were so, the meaning of the sentence would be somewhat as follows: "You are now going forth from a pagan city as Abraham went forth ages ago from among the ancestors of these very Chaldæans. He went alone, but God was with him and made him prosperous and strong. He went because he wanted to serve God in a higher way than was possible amid heathen corruption and restriction. Do as he did, and you shall be blessed and increased in the land of your fathers." It has been surmised that if the rock is a figure for Abraham, the pit is a figure for Sarah, the traditional ancestress of Israel. This may be so, but the figure is even more applicable to the Chaldæans, from whom Abraham was supposed to have sprung. This race inherited a low-lying territory around the Persian Gulf—hence, perhaps, the allusion to "the hole of the pit whence ye were digged."

But somehow I do not think these words were spoken on the great occasion thus described. You will admit from what I have just said that, even if they were, they would make quite good sense and contain an inspiring message, but I think the message is greater and more helpful if we regard it as having been uttered to the returned exiles in Jerusalem during the period of discouragement which followed that home-coming. I think I see something here of most fascinating interest and suggestiveness. These old prophets of Israel were adepts in the use of what may be termed double imagery;

they would employ a figure in two different senses at one and the same moment. It is obvious, for instance, as I have already pointed out, that the rock here stands for Abraham, as the next sentence proves: "Look unto Abraham your father," etc. But is it not also an allusion to Mount Zion? In the one case, therefore, it is a reminder of the spiritual ancestry of the Jewish people, and, in the other, of their national history. Just look at these two, and look how illuminating they are. According to Jewish tradition, Abraham had been a man of altogether exceptional force of character and religious insight. He had been brought up amid surroundings which were not at all likely to produce a monotheistic faith. The only worship with which he was acquainted was of a degrading and sensual kind, sometimes accompanied by human sacrifices. In order to break away from this he had to break away from his kinsfolk altogether. He had courage and strength enough to do this and to trust his destiny to God. Only a quite exceptional man could ever have taken such a course. Remember, I am neither affirming nor denying the truth of the legend; I am only recalling later Israelitish belief concerning it. A man like Abraham could fitly be termed a rock; and this, says the prophet, was the rock from which the Jewish people had been hewn.

This was their stock, their origin, and the reason for their existence. It was a great thing to say. Although they had fallen on evil days, and seemed to have lost their moral vigour, there was no reason to believe that it need be so for ever. The lineage

of Abraham could yet do great things in the world under the favour and direction of Abraham's God. Is not this the meaning of the exhortation, more than once repeated in the sections which follow: "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the Holy City. . . . Shake thyself from the dust; arise, sit thee down, O Jerusalem; loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion"?

Now take the other meaning of the figure. Jerusalem was built upon a rock, and her poets and prophets loved to sing about their holy mountain where God dwelt. To them this mountain used to be a symbol for the stability and permanence of the nation itself under the blessing of God. "They that trust in the Lord are as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed." Israel had a long history to look back upon, a history full of glorious deliverances and splendid achievements. It was thus quite natural for these people of Jehovah to think of their covenant with Him as the rock upon which their national life was built, just as Mount Zion was the seat of their city and their temple. When the hour of disaster came, when city and temple were laid in ruins, and the flower of the population massacred or carried away into captivity, it must have seemed at first as though the very foundations of Mount Zion had been shattered. Babylon, the cruel city of the plains, was a very pit of hell to these homesick highlanders. Then came the deliverance, and now they were home again, sitting disconsolate in the dust and ashes of their former glory. It is at this moment that the prophet re-

minds them of their past in such a way as to rouse them to new effort. In substance his appeal is as follows: "Remember, this is Mount Zion, where your fathers used to look upon the face of God. You were hewn away from it by the terrible hand of the Chaldæan invader. God placed you at his mercy because of your sins, but He did not leave you desolate and forsaken. He lifted you out of the horrible pit and the miry clay, and has placed your feet upon this rock once more. Think of it. This is holy ground; while you are here you can reaffirm your ancient covenant with God. If He has delivered you from Babylon surely He can do more. Set to work at once to recover all you have lost. Recall the glorious past, and see to it that you have a still more glorious future in living union with your fathers' God."

This seems to me almost indisputably to have been the true bearing of the exhortation contained in our text, and I hope you will not think that the time spent in examining it has been wasted; it is always helpful to see just how a great sentence like this came into being, and what it meant to those who first heard it. It could not fail to be an inspiring influence to these discouraged Jews who were sitting mourning amid the failure of their hopes and the disappointment of their expectations. It is quite reasonable to suppose that it had something to do with the after success of Nehemiah and his friends, who set to work like heroes and rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, with trowel in one hand and sword in the other. It was a magnificent task, [illegible] accomplished.

How human it all is! and how closely it resembles certain situations with which we are more or less familiar every day of our lives! We are constantly finding ourselves in scenes and emergencies wherein we need to be reminded of the rock whence we were hewn and the hole of the pit whence we were digged. We need to think of both in order that we may understand who and what we are and to accomplish anything worth doing in this world. The rock whence we were hewn is God; the pit whence we were digged is animalism. We are here to build the holy city, new Jerusalem, and our hope for the future lies in our knowledge of our past. Ponder what this means, and see whether there is not something in it that will put heart into you this very day and enable you to grasp your sword and trowel with a new courage and a stronger faith. Who and what are you? The materialist would settle the matter by saying that you are of the earth earthy; you belong to the dust, and unto the dust you must return; that was the beginning and that will be the end. Your ancestors were monstrous reptiles sporting in primeval slime—your origin, you see, is not exalted. Your forbears may have come over with the Conqueror, but they were also first cousins to the earth-worm and the crocodile; this reflection ought to humble you when you are inclined to think too much of yourself. When you feel the tide of animal passion surging through your veins, be aware that it is the same force which controls the energies of the ape, the tiger, and the swine. You and they have not only a common heritage but a common instinct; their

blind impulses are much the same as yours, and you can no more escape their dominance than they. The man who talks like that is not necessarily a pessimist, nor is he wide of the truth, but he sees no farther than the hole of the pit whence he was digged; he has never lifted his gaze to the rock whence he was hewn. And yet even the facts of human nature and the lessons of human history ought to lead him to do so. After all, the worm is not the man; there is something else to be taken into account, and it is that something else which marks him a son of God. Human history is a sad chapter of crime and folly, but its darkest page has not been without some gleams of a divine splendour which tells of a higher origin than the primeval slime.

> Trailing clouds of glory do we come
> From God who is our home.

"Oh, but," some one may remonstrate, "this is mere gratuitous assumption. How do you know that of which you speak? Why repudiate your humble beginnings, seeing that you cannot demonstrate the actuality of any other kind of beginning? You must not try any longer to foist upon an incredulous world some fairy story about a Garden of Eden and an immaculate humanity, facts are facts, however unpalatable, and we have no other facts to go upon than those which science has slowly and laboriously extracted from Nature's records of the past." Well, I know that; but I know something else too, and so do you. I do not deny the hole of the pit, but I believe in the rock

whence we were hewn before ever we made acquaintance with the pit. Love, truth, the splendour of moral achievement, the glory of self-sacrifice, the sweetness of communion with that which is too high to find adequate expression in this world, the joy and thrill of seeing beyond material good to that ineffable somewhat at whose call the spiritual man will surrender all the desires of the flesh and the satisfactions of earthly existence—these are realities as irrefutable as any with which science has ever been called upon to deal; and, what is more, you believe it. You reverence these more than you do aught that is merely material, and in so doing you share with all whose opinion is worth taking into account. The world knows what is truly great if once it has been made to see it. Whence came these things? Does the hole of the pit account for them? No, indeed; they must have gone into it before they could be dug out of it. No one denies that they did come out of it, but how did they get there? They are the tokens of your divine lineage. The very fact that you have been lifted out of the horrible pit and the miry clay and made to reach out your hand among the stars is evidence of an origin that preceded the pit and speaks of a world in which your angel doth always behold the face of the Father.

> We are children of splendour and flame,
> Of shuddering also and tears;
> Magnificent, out of the dust we came,
> And abject from the spheres.

No, the hole of the pit does not account for you, and yet it is helpful to look back to it and down

into its fearsome depths. We have to ask ourselves what it was that could bring forth from that dark and mysterious womb the humanity of to-day. What infinite pain and struggle it has cost! And it is not over yet. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God." But the hand that has accomplished so much must be able to work greater wonders still. Yes, indeed it is worth while to look to the hole of the pit whence we were digged, for to do so inspires us with hope and courage for the height that is yet to be climbed. To have come as far as we have is assurance that we can go farther; our present halting place is only a stage on the road to a greater glory. But from where we now stand we are able to see something of the meaning and the purpose of it all, and to feel ourselves akin to that eternal mind which conceived it and will carry it to fruition. You cannot see a snow-clad peak from the bottom of a coal mine. You need to get out, and, better still, ascend some further eminence before the full strength and splendour burst upon your vision. That is what we are doing now. God has brought us up out of the pit; we are climbing the hill of the Lord; in the end we shall stand in His holy place and know as we are known. But we know enough even now to be able to recognise the rock whence we were hewn. Christ has shown us God in showing us the greatness of man. We see that it was well that there ever had to be a descent of the divine essence into the pit and the clay, that the grandeur of the home-coming of the sons of light

might be ours. I think in the great day of revelation we shall all say so. I would rather have been God's warrior on the stricken field than enjoy the eternal delights of a heaven that had never known either struggle or pain. We can only understand the rock whence we were hewn by realising the hole of the pit whence we were digged.

There are a thousand different ways in which this magnificent truth can help us in our daily life. Let me tell you one. At this moment I may be addressing some man or woman into whose life tragedy has come because the power of the pit is still great. Its effects may be felt in your own character or in that of some one else; but in either case they have resulted in much shame and sorrow. Do we not all know of cases in which some man of unquestionable goodness and uprightness is suddenly overthrown by some temptation to which he is exposed in an hour of weakness? The strangest inconsistencies and even contradictions are brought to light in this way. The same man may behave like a hero at one time and a felon at another. The man whom you thought to be strong turns out to be pitiably weak. Some one who was to you an inspiration and an example in earlier days unaccountably deteriorates as years go on and finally becomes a moral wreck. It is a curious and puzzling thing that magnanimity and meanness, frankness and cunning, sweetness and spite, truth and falsehood, generosity and covetousness, lovableness and unscrupulous selfishness, can co-exist in the same nature. We sometimes ask ourselves in astonishment, Can this be the same man? Is he a hypo-

crite? Which is the true man, for surely both cannot be true? Probably we are quite wrong in our judgments. Human nature is a strange medley, and, impossible though it may seem, the god and the brute are often not very far apart within the same soul. Is there any man in this congregation at this moment who is not conscious of tendencies and impulses within himself which would work his moral overthrow if they were not kept well in hand? The volcano is always there, even though the fire may never be seen. Are we not only too familiar with the sad and intractable cases in which an individual seems foredoomed to go wrong? Within the very same family circle one lad will be his parents' joy and pride, while another exhibits from childhood vicious characteristics which lead to disgrace and ruin in maturer life. We may sum up the matter by saying that even the best of men are conscious of the presence of the power of the pit, the qualities which we share with the brute creation. Sometimes these qualities obtain the mastery all in a moment, to the surprise of the world; in others they seem dominant from the first, and inevitably produce the moral degenerate. What is the gospel for this problem, if there be a gospel?

Well, here it is. As I said on Thursday morning, the very same force which, misdirected, will drive a man to the devil will raise him to the stature of a god. You sometimes hear of the sudden conversion of a man of evil life and the thoroughness of the change. The truth is that the old force receives a new direction and is governed

by a new spirit. Graft an apple-tree on a thorn-bush, and the old root will supply the sap and savour of the new fruit. The same is true of human nature. There is no quality or tendency of our being which is radically and intrinsically bad; it is good or bad only in its manifestations. If you want to save a man get him to see this. Get him to understand that all the force he possesses is divine. Bid him look to the rock whence he was hewn as well as to the hole of the pit to which he seems to belong. Make him know that although the pit has still some power to hold him, the power that lifts is greater still. Do not permit him to sit down in despair amid the ruins and ashes of his worthier hopes and achievements. Cry to him to shake himself from the dust and put on his beautiful garments. Beneath all moral weakness is a divine strength to be called upon. Within every soul is a latent manhood which is the very life of God, a rock of spiritual strength whose foundations are eternal. Paul says that that rock was with Israel in the wilderness, and he calls it Christ—the God in man. You are not of the pit, but the holy mountain. You may have been in the pit, but nothing can hold you there if once you realise whence you came and what you are. And if you are out of the pit, what folly to believe that your future is only to be one of weeping and discouragement amid the waste places of Jerusalem! "Build ye the walls of Zion," sword in one hand and trowel in the other! Believe in the highest, not only as above but as within, and it shall be to you a rock of salvation. When you look into the pit,

let it be to praise God that you have had something to strive for and something to win, and never suffer yourself to doubt for a moment that the victory of yesterday assures the triumph of to-morrow. A little while ago Mr. A. G. Hales, the famous war correspondent and novelist, sent me a few lines written by him (apropos of one of my sermons, I think) on the point we are now discussing. I do not know that they were ever published, but I dare say the author will not mind my quoting one stanza from them, as it is an admirable summing up of what I have been trying to enforce this morning:

By the fireside sadly dreaming, tired of work and tired of scheming:
Life's a coloured bubble filled with air.
Vain is all the bitter fighting, vain the cruel savage smiting,
Vain the triumph and despair.

Every cradle calls this query till the whirling brain grows weary,
What was man before his mortal birth?
Equal here stand clown and teacher, saint and sage and gutter preacher;
Mystery fills the earth.

Stand them gently side by side, like gaunt grey bridegroom by fair young bride,
Crowing cradle and silent shell.
Then bow the knee in silent trust that human dust is *only* dust—
Believing all is well.

Yes, all is well, not in spite of the pit and the clay, but because of them. Through these we ascend to that from whence we came, having achieved what we are—not dust, but God.

VII

THE SOCIAL JUDGMENT

"*Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.*"—AMOS iv. 12.

A FEW days ago I was preaching in a mining centre in the Rhondda Valley in South Wales, a place where the inhabitants take their religion very seriously. As I left the railway station I found a number of people in the streets carrying banners inscribed with texts, and was informed that these were a protest against my presence. When I reached the hall where the service was to be held a zealous lady lowered her banner so that the words upon it should come immediately before my eyes. I could not have avoided reading them even if I had wished to do so. There in large white letters upon a red ground was the minatory exhortation, "Prepare to meet thy God." I suppose the action was intended for my benefit, and the good soul who performed it evidently thought I stood in need of it. But it set me thinking. I recollected that among the tons of religious literature—principally tracts and sermons—which are showered upon me by every post, this text always occupies a prominent place. It seems to be a favourite. Evidently the senders are firmly possessed by the conviction that I am a very wicked person, living in open

defiance of the Almighty, and that things are going to be made unpleasant for me by and by unless I mend my ways. Occasionally in the epistles which accompany the text one detects an element of satisfaction at the prospect. Perhaps it would be too much to say that some of the senders appear to be rejoicing at what they suppose is about to overtake me. It does not seem to enter their heads that this biblical sentence may mean something rather different from the *post mortem* punishment of an unfaithful preacher. I may be as bad as these well-meaning people imagine me to be, or even worse, but my charter of condemnation is not contained in this passage. Here is no suggestion concerning a future hell, or a scheme of salvation, or the importance of availing oneself of the merits of a Redeemer, or anything of that kind; in fact, in some respects it is much more interesting and much nearer to what we know of human life. In its bearing it is not individualistic at all, but national. It has no reference to the world to come, but solely to this one. It assumes a state of things with which civilisation is only too familiar at the present day, and the warning it presents is just as applicable to us as to the people who first heard it.

Will you allow me to show you, as briefly as I can, how this is? It is my custom to devote more time to the exegesis of a text than most preachers do, but I hope not unprofitably. If you want to understand the present, study the past. It is always helpful to know, as far as it can be ascertained, exactly what the author of any biblical saying meant by it, and what people were saying and

thinking about it at the time. It will often be found that the utterance is greater in its implications than the author himself knew, but it is not right to read into it something essentially different from that which was in his mind.

Now, who was this man Amos, and what made him use this language? Here is a bit of interesting human history for you. This Amos was a herdsman and fruit-grower who took to preaching about the middle of the eighth century B.C. At this time the land of Israel had become two kingdoms. Amos probably belonged to the south, but his preaching was mostly concerned with the north, mainly because it was the richer and more powerful of the two. This was a period of unexampled material prosperity for the northern kingdom of Israel. It was not a country of great natural resources in itself, but it lay on the main trading route between Assyria, on the one hand, and Egypt on the other. It was therefore rapidly growing wealthy, and had produced an order of great merchant princes. The descendants of Abraham have always been remarkable for their money-making abilities, and perhaps the geographical situation of their country may have had something to do with fostering their tendencies in this respect. The immediate result of this increase of prosperous intercourse with foreign nations was an outburst of luxury and vice. If you want to read an eloquent description of this refer to the first Isaiah, the great prophet and statesman who succeeded Amos. It appears that, as usual, the concentration of great wealth in a few hands tended towards

the oppression of the many. Slavery grew rapidly; there were crowds of foreign slaves in the palaces of the nobles, while the freemen of Israel were being reduced to the position of serfs on the land they had formerly owned. These palaces must have been enormous structures replete with everything that could minister to the senses. They were often built of marble and inlaid with ivory and gold. The women of the wealthier classes seem to have become demoralised and heartless, as we are told some of their modern representatives are to-day. Religion was punctiliously attended to, but was almost completely divorced from morality, as has often been the case. The priests accommodated themselves to the manners of the time, and taught that Jehovah was the God of Israel only, and that the national prosperity was a token of His favour. They said that He was to be served by ritual and sacrifice, which meant, of course, that the priestly order was to be maintained in comfort and consideration. It was just like what took place in the history of Catholic Christianity many centuries later, when rascally kings and nobles gave large endowments to the Church in order to keep, as they supposed, in favour with God.

This, then, was the situation in ancient Israel at the time when my text was written. The service of God had become idolatry. The worshippers believed that God was their God much in the same way as though He were their feudal lord. It was His business to look after them and to secure to them material enjoyment and victory over their enemies; they, on their part, had to endow His

sanctuaries and be careful to observe His feasts and sacrifices. This was what brought Amos into the open. He had received no training either as prophet or priest, but as no one else would speak he felt he must. There is one vivid interpolation in the seventh chapter which gives his own account of himself and how he fell foul of the priesthood. "Then Amaziah, the priest of Beth-el, sent to Jeroboam, king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. . . . Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit. And the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto My people Israel." The burden of his message was sure to be unpopular, for it was a prophecy of doom and destruction. He declared that no nation could stand which had trampled on justice and right as this nation was doing. It would be overthrown and blotted out. Listen to the following fragment of his preaching and you will catch the spirit of the whole. "And I will smite the winter house with the summer house; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end, saith the Lord. Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mountain of Samaria, which oppress the poor, which crush the needy, which say to their masters, Bring, and let us drink. (Amos here anticipates Father Bernard Vaughan. These kine of Bashan, as he contemptuously terms them, were the loose and dissolute women of the

Court and wealthier classes.) . . . I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer Me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from Me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream. . . . Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail. Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit? That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat? The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works. Shall not the land tremble for this, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein? and it shall rise up wholly as a flood; and it shall be cast out and drowned, as by the flood of Egypt." You see that these ancient financiers had already learned the art of cornering the people's food supply. The privileged orders were indignant at this kind of language, but it all came true. Within thirty years from the time when this prophecy was uttered this northern kingdom of Israel fell before the sword of Assyria and has never been restored.

You can see now the real meaning of my text. It was a declaration of belief in the moral government of the universe and the working of God in human

history. How often the same kind of thing has happened! Over and over again in the course of human experience religion and morality have been divorced from each other, or rather institutional religion has been thrown on the side of a conventional morality which ignored or contradicted the deeper sanctions of right and wrong. It is only too fatally easy for an institution to become an end in itself and to adopt a false standard of sanctity. Men are always prepared to call that good which is to their material advantage and makes less demand upon them than some other course of action would involve. How seldom we ever pause to ask ourselves why a thing should be called sacred or profane, good or evil, right or wrong! It is noteworthy that what the privileged religious orders were doing in the time of Amos they have always been doing more or less. Once get a thing called venerable, and recognised as such, and before long you have all the forces of mammon sheltering behind it. Not that its advocates and representatives are conscious hypocrites, but when the stability of the institution becomes identical with their own self-interest it is but natural that they should defend the latter by safeguarding the former. Privilege has always been doing this, and ever and anon the Spirit of God has had to destroy the sham to recover the reality. Thus in the thirteenth century of the Christian era the long struggle of the Empire and the Papacy ended in the triumph of the latter. The Pope sat on the throne of St. Peter wearing his triple diadem and holding aloft the sceptre of universal dominion, saying: "I am Cæsar; I am

emperor." This was done in the name of Christ and with the very loftiest pretensions to sanctity, and yet it was the very opposite of the Spirit of Christ. The arrogance and cupidity of the priestly order were conjoined to a corruption of manners which has never been excelled; and yet—such is the power of names—every simple soul in Christendom believed that, although individual Popes might be wicked, the system itself was somehow sacred and the expression of the will of God. It was only here and there that some clear-sighted man dared to question this assumption, but whenever he did so it was at the peril of his life. No more appalling chapter of human suffering has ever been written than that of the tortures inflicted upon the Alpine peasants who tried to read a higher meaning into the word "good" than that which was implied in the practice of the Catholic Church as represented by her official heads. Note how rare it is that a reformer ever comes forth from the ranks of privilege in Church or State. Your Amos may come from the plough; it is but seldom that he comes from a conventional school of the prophets. There is nothing which tends to blunt the moral perceptions so much as to have been trained to regard a set of ideas as good because they are called good, and to believe that an institution is sacred because it has high-sounding and long-standing claims to be considered such. If, in addition, your hopes of comfort and advancement are bound up with the accepted standard, you are not likely to look with favour upon what some rustic preacher has to say about the unreality of it

all. It sounds so presumptuous on the part of the herdsman to question the divineness of the established order. And yet whenever Amos speaks, it were well for the world to listen to him rather than to Amaziah or he may be found to be the herald of doom. This sentence which forms my text was not a threat but a warning. Had Israel prepared for that new advent of God of which the coming of Amos was but the token she might have been a living nation still. Had the Papacy listened to John Huss, John Wycliffe, and such as they, we might not have been gazing upon a divided Christendom to-day.

But how is it with us at the present moment? I should be sorry to think that a precise parallel could justly be drawn between the Western civilisation of to-day and that of northern Israel nearly three millenniums ago or that of Catholic Europe in the sixteenth century. But when we look closely at things as they are the same tendencies are observable in a large degree. To begin with, we have the same alliance between institutional religion and a false standard of morality. We see privilege claiming the support of religion and religion honouring the claim. Worst of all, we find the representatives of institutional religion apparently unaware of the deepest needs of the time and the urgent call of the Spirit of Christ to meet and satisfy them. Observe how hotly the average man will resent any appeal which makes a drastic demand upon his generosity and self-sacrifice. At once he will invoke religion as a weapon of defence, and tell you that the gospel in which he has been

trained is something altogether different from that which you are now proclaiming. Perhaps it is, but his reason for preferring it is that it is probably a good deal easier.

Let me try by a concrete example to show you a little more clearly what I mean. It is quite likely that in my congregation this morning there is some man of means who has risen from comparatively humble beginnings to wealth and success. I wish to speak directly to that man, as though he and I were alone and face to face. He may be willing to listen to me saying from the pulpit what he would not tolerate for a moment if I were to say it to him in private.

How did you attain your present position of prominence and respectability? You have done so, I doubt not, by what the world would account fair and honourable means. You have denied yourself indulgence, and laboured early and late, at a time when your fellows were taking life more easily. You would say that every penny you possess you have worked hard for, and that success was slow in coming. Your friends would say you deserve it all because of your industry and integrity. You have never been known to break your word; you are strong and reliable in the ordinary practical affairs of life; you have been staunch and true to those who have trusted and stood by you. In your own way you have tried to do good. Early in life you made a practice of going to church and identifying yourself with religious activities as far as your circumstances would permit. As you have got on you have found yourself a person of influ-

ence in certain circles. Perhaps you have been what is called a generous giver, with the result that you are looked up to and considered an authority even in matters of doctrine. You have a set of religious opinions which you have never cared to examine too thoroughly, but which suffice to carry you through life. You believe you are what the Church calls a sinner, but your minister must be careful to say so only in the pulpit. You are a sinner in a Pickwickian sense, for, as a matter of fact, you pride yourself on your uprightness and sterling worth. You would feel it to be altogether out of place if at some banquet given in your honour the chairman were to remark that you were a sinner, but that you had a few good qualities as well. Apparently, therefore, you have two standards in reference to your character which you never attempt to reconcile. Being a sinner you think you need salvation, and for this you rely upon the merits of your Redeemer. You are convinced that by doing so you will go to heaven when you die. There are a number of other things which you believe about this, but I need not mention them now. Suffice it to say that you feel your religion to be very real. You pray to God and you think you love Jesus; you want all men to be converted to Him, and therefore you consider it most important that home and foreign missions should be promoted as a means to this end. You take an interest in public life, and perhaps you go so far as to render valuable service in the encouragement of certain schemes of social reform. You believe in temperance legislation, the better housing of the

poor, an efficient system of national education, and such like. But you draw the line rigidly, both religiously and socially, at what you call dangerous innovations. You are most indignant with those modern preachers who seem to you to be unsound on the person of Christ, the Atonement, and the sinfulness of sin. You are even more indignant and alarmed at what you call the wild and impracticable proposals of spoliation and confiscation which usually accompany their doctrines and are preached by many people who have no religion at all. These tendencies seem to you so serious that you cannot find terms strong enough wherewith to denounce the perpetrators of the evil. You call them free-thinkers and materialists, false prophets who make the Cross of Christ of non-effect, and so on. You would be glad to see them silenced if it could be done without rousing too much public attention. Probably you are using all the influence at your command to secure that the pulpits of this land shall be filled only with preachers who will proclaim what you call the grand old gospel.

Now, will you permit me to come to close quarters with you, my friend? I think you will admit that I have not been unfair in my estimate of your character. I not only admit your sincerity, but respect it, and I fully recognise and admire your worth. But I cannot spare you. You stand for the most damnable force in the civilised world to-day, materialism in alliance with religion. It is infinitely worse than materialism, unblushing and avowed, and far more difficult to fight. It is you who are the materialist, not the atheists and free-

thinkers you denounce. You are calling evil good and good evil. I question all your ideals, and arraign at the bar of God the means by which you have attained your success as well as those by which you are keeping it. Your early desire to get on was not a right desire. Your efforts to rise into a superior social class have all been contemptible. You have been trying all the while to do the best you can for yourself, and, although you have a kind heart and are loved at home, you are thinking so much of yourself to-day that you cannot see with a true moral perspective. Your belief that God has prospered you is a false belief. God never commanded you to get rich; he commanded you to bless mankind. Your heart ought to have been filled with different emotions, and your soul with loftier ideals than those which have governed your career. I question the very root motive of all your industry and perseverance; you have been playing for your own hand, and therefore, though you would never own it, you have been trying to serve God and mammon at the same time. I question even your integrity. To make a business success you have had to steel your heart sometimes. Your prosperity has meant others' adversity. You have seen men go under as you rose, and, though you did not actually fling them down, you have felt no responsibility for their fall. Your success has meant a long struggle, and there must have been times when you saw that the ethics of that struggle were not those of the Christ in whom you professed to believe. Now comes the hardest part of all. Your belief in that Christ is a lie. You do not

know what He stood for, and you are dishonouring Him in your ideals every day of your life. Your doctrine of Atonement is a sham. If you really believed in it you could never again be content to occupy your position of privilege and material power while thousands of your fellow-men were lying in poverty and pain. No one ever needed to die in order that God might forgive you and let you into heaven, and no one ever did. But some one had to die—and some are dying now—that the love of God might be revealed by man to man and draw us all together in a spiritual brotherhood. *That* is the true Atonement—the making one of man with man, and all with God—the everything which tends to keep men apart is the very opposite. You do *not* believe in the Atonement, for you have hardly begun to realise what it is. Lastly, your thought about sin is radically vicious. There is no sin, my friend, but that of trying to look after yourself at the expense of your brother. And have you not been doing that? Are you not doing it now? Does not your very success in life imply that you are doing it? All your almsgiving and psalm-singing put together will not compensate for the general character and direction of your life in its effect upon mankind. I observe how angry you become when preachers trifle, as you call it, with the grave subject of sin. You are the trifler; you are the hypocrite, though you do not know it. You say you want the simple gospel; here it is. There is no service of God which is not the service of man. I charge you in the name of the Most High to cease from lip-reverence to Jesus Christ until

you are prepared to follow Him in your life. I bid you ask yourself why you resent anything uttered in the name of Christ which means material loss to you or the order to which you belong. Is it not because you are selfish? When you protest against an unfamiliar gospel is it because it makes too little demand upon your moral nature or because it makes too much?

In thus describing the religious and ethical standards of a very large class in our British community to-day I am well aware of the difficulties surrounding the subject. We have for so long been accustomed to take these standards for granted that it is almost impossible to get people to see that they are false and wrong. The word of the Lord has gone forth against them and they shall perish. The question is whether England will perish along with them, or whether we can save her for a nobler and more glorious day. Listen to the following piece of rugged writing:—

"Herod stalks abroad this very day, and this very hour in London—the blood of little children upon his hands. Herod lives in great houses. Herod is in Parliament. He is respected and honoured, and his name is in the mouths of men. But he is none the less a murderer. He murders children for money! He murders the children of men who are in their prime—of men—who he says are too old to work for him because they are forty. He lies, and he knows that he lies, when he says that they are too old. Why, he is over forty himself. He turns them away so that he can sweat more blood out of other men. As an Englishman I speak

against this hellish and atrocious crime of condemning men to die of starvation—who have got to their prime—for the sake of making a little gold. My voice may not be heard, but as sure as there is a God in heaven—and mark me there is a God in heaven—England will suffer for allowing this cowardly and mean thing to be done. England will fall through it. England must check these rapacious wolves and blood-suckers of employers or England will be smashed and broken. These employers are traitors to our country. They are selling it as Judas sold Christ, for money."

This was written by a modern Amos, a man who came from the ranks of the toilers and sufferers of this wealthy country, and from a home where often there was not enough to eat. I bid you note that what he is saying is precisely what the old Israelitish prophet is saying in my text, and for the same reason. It is God who speaks in words like these, and you must listen. In the colossal struggle which is now upon us for the realisation of the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven, on which side will you be found? Are you prepared to contend for your own hand against God? Do you think you can cajole Him by using the language of piety? You may deceive yourself, but you cannot deceive Him. It is not the shameless profligates, the cynical reprobates, who neither fear God nor regard man, who are the greatest danger to England to-day. It is the people who set up an idol and call it God, who worship themselves in the name of righteousness; and as sure as there is a God in heaven that lie will have to go. Open

your eyes and you shall see whither the hand of God is pointing. Open your hearts to the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, and ask yourself what it would have you do. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee but to deal justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

VIII

MINISTERING THE BREAD OF LIFE

"But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat."—MATT. xiv. 16.

THE story of the miraculous feeding of the five thousand by our Lord in the wilderness is remarkable in many ways. For one thing, it happens to be the only miracle recorded in all the four gospels, a fact that is not without significance in helping us to understand the purpose with which it was originally written. The whole subject is extremely interesting, far more so than I shall be able to make clear in a single sermon. To begin with, however, let us put ourselves in possession of the recorded facts, and then make our deductions. According to all the Evangelists the scene of the miracle was a desert place; there was a multitude of five thousand men; Matthew says there were some women and children also. The disciples of Jesus were about to send these people away, but their Master prevented them from doing so, saying: "They need not depart; give ye them to eat." They reply that all the food they possess is but five loaves and two fishes. Jesus commands the disciples to make the multitude sit down; takes the food in His hand; looks up to heaven; blesses

the supply, and distributes it to the twelve who carry it to the waiting host. But as they share it it grows, until the hunger of all is abundantly satisfied. At the end of the feast Jesus bids them gather up the fragments, and when they do so it is found that there are no less than twelve baskets full.

Let me put a straight question to all the level-headed people in this congregation. Do you really believe this story in the literal sense? I have no doubt there are a few among you who think they do, but these few represent the very class which would most sturdily refuse to believe any such thing if it were told, say, of the Bishop of London in Soho yesterday. That very quality of mind which bids you accept a venerable tradition without question is the quality of mind which would reject it without question if it belonged to your own day and generation. It is your so-called practical man who will believe any mortal thing, no matter how improbable, so long as it is in the Bible; but would never dream of believing anything out of the common in every-day life unless it were supported by incontrovertible evidence. His credulity in the one case and scepticism in the other are both due to a lack of imagination. Permit me to say, then, before going any further, that if you accept this story as literal four-footed fact you will land yourself in an impossible position; and not only so, but you will miss the very point for which it was ever told at all. The men who wrote this story were Orientals. Neither they nor their immediate circle of readers were in the least deceived by their

use of language. They used this great story—for it is a great story—as a parable to illustrate the spiritual value of Jesus to the world. They practically say so—if you care to follow the evidence closely.

There are many reasons why we ought not to take such a story literally, but I have no time to deal with them this morning. I will content myself with pointing out only two things which are sufficient to show that the writers never meant us to take it literally. The first is the fact that the same kind of miracle is recorded twice in Matthew and Mark. In the former case five thousand people were fed and in the latter four. Five loaves sufficed in the first instance and seven in the second. In Matthew's gospel these two miracles, so strikingly alike, are recorded in successive chapters—the fourteenth and fifteenth respectively. It may be that they are both early versions of the same legend, but that does not dispose of the difficulty I am going to state, which is this: The disciples expressed just the same kind of surprise on the second occasion as on the first—"Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?" If they had already seen five thousand fed with five loaves, why should they be incredulous as to the possibility of feeding four thousand with seven? But a more convincing piece of evidence is given in the sixteenth chapter of the same gospel—that is, the chapter immediately following the double record of this stupendous miracle. We are told that immediately after the feeding of the four thousand Jesus took ship to the

other side of the lake, and that the disciples forgot to take bread with them. When they arrived at Magdala the Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus demanding a sign from heaven as the credential of His authority to teach. Jesus refused to give any sign other than the self-evidencing nature of the teaching itself, and rebuked them for their materialism, affirming at the same time that the word of truth needed no miracle to commend it. When He had said this He turned to His disciples and added: "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees." The disciples at once jumped to the conclusion that this remark was made because they had brought no bread with them, and He was unwilling that they should have to beg food from His adversaries. Permit me to quote in full the striking passage which now follows:—

"And Jesus, perceiving it, said, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves because ye have no bread? Do ye not yet perceive, neither remember, the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? How is it that ye do not perceive that I spake not to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Then understood they how that He bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

Now observe the following points in regard to this exceedingly interesting and life-like incident. First, if Jesus had just been engaged in feeding

thousands of people in a miraculous manner, what need was there to ask Him for a sign from heaven? Surely, no more convincing sign could have been given if miracles were required. If I were to undertake to feed five thousand of the unemployed, gratuitously and miraculously, in Trafalgar Square to-morrow morning, it would make me the most famous and popular person in the three kingdoms. If Messrs. Maskelyne and Cook were to challenge me to perform some other kind of miracle as a sign that I really possessed supernatural power, the challenge would seem ridiculous. The papers would say: "He fed five thousand people free of charge, and with no visible means of doing so. What other kind of miracle can you possibly want?" Secondly, why were the disciples concerned at having taken no bread? Surely, if they had just seen thousands of people fed in such a stupendous manner, they would not have been apprehensive that a mere dozen would have to go hungry, or that it would be necessary to carry a supply of food about with them? Thirdly, and most convincing of all, the whole point of what Jesus has to say about the twelve and the seven baskets full of fragments, is that He was speaking in a spiritual, not a material sense. His question to them: "Do ye not yet understand?" might with equal propriety be put to us. The feeding of the multitude was not the feeding of the body, but the soul. The whole story is symbolical. It was the bread from heaven, the bread of life, which Jesus distributed to His disciples, and which they, in turn, were authorised to distribute to those who

were hungering and thirsting after righteousness. The striking story behind our text is, therefore, a picture of what has actually been taking place in the history of the Christian gospel. Jesus came into the world endowed with divine authority and power; took up the meagre spiritual truth which He found already present in the religious experience of those who were humble and sincere; increased and multiplied it, and passed it on through appointed messengers to all who were willing and ready to receive it. The indirect effects of that spiritual feeding have been no less striking than the direct. The twelve baskets of fragments represent the overflow into other channels, so to speak, of the glad tidings of great joy which were first preached by twelve simple men in the highways of Galilee and Jerusalem nineteen hundred years ago. It is not only within the Church of Christ that the power of that message has been felt, but in a thousand indirect ways in the amelioration of the lot of humankind. Apart from churches altogether, outside the ordinary usages of religion, the message of Jesus has been at work, and its fragments are being gathered up in everything great and good which is being done for society at large as the result of His life on earth. I am tempted to dwell for a while on the mystic numbers twelve and seven, which used to mean so much to the Jews, but I have not time to do so. All I wish to point out now is that this story of the feeding of the multitude from small resources was originally intended as a most felicitous and beautiful figure wherewith to describe the spiritual work of Jesus in the world.

From this examination of the subject-matter of our text I hope you will now agree with me that the only miracle alluded to in all the accounts of the feeding of the five thousand, as well as in the words of our text, was the giving of the bread of life in the heart of the seeker after truth. Christ is still feeding the five thousand—and more than the five thousand, a multitude whom no man can number—with this "bread which cometh down from heaven and giveth life unto the world." There is nothing we need so much, and yet we are often tempted to seek sorry substitutes for it. Like the Pharisees, we seek after a sign, or we try to satisfy ourselves with the leaven of unreality and pretence, but in the end we shall have to know that apart from the bread of life there is nothing upon which to feed our poor starved souls. Moreover, it is a possession which increases by sharing; it belongs to the pure in heart, the brave, and faithful, and true, in the things of God. The humblest know it best, if so be that their humility implies a confident reliance upon the good-will of the eternal Father. For heights or depths, for weal or woe, for joy or pain, for the hour of rest or the season of toil, there is no lasting sustenance other than that spiritual food which in the hands of Jesus became the greatest and most satisfying force that the world has ever known.

You all know something of what it is, although perhaps you may think you do not. It is not a doctrine, nor a form of words, nor a sacramental system, nor anything other than what any true man may prove and experience for himself. Do

not tell me you do not know it. You do; we all do; everybody does, good and bad alike. Pick up a religious newspaper, and you will find that on every page this something is referred to and called God. Pick up a so-called secular journal, and you will find it no less plainly referred to, but it may have any one of a hundred names. Go to the theatre and you will find it on the stage. Visit the Legislature, and you will hear the orators on both sides of the House appealing to it. Mingle with a crowd, or enter any public meeting, and you will soon become conscious that, in the thoughts and sentiments which are finding expression, there is always a unity of objective; all the effort is directed towards something which has not yet been reached and yet is nearer than anything else—that something which is as immediately the cause of all the fructifying activity of the modern world as the law of gravitation is the cause of the flow of rivers and the rise of verdure all over the habitable globe. I will tell you in one sentence what it is; it is that in you which is also the soul of the universe. That is the bread of life. That was what men saw so plainly in Jesus nearly two thousand years ago. That is the basal fact of all experience. If men are not living true to that, they will sooner or later have to find out their blunder; if they are, they need nothing more.

Let us go forth from this place this morning with this peerless truth dominating our thoughts and affections. Jesus was the bread of life. Yes, and so you ought to be. Let not your reverence for Him blind your vision of this ideal. The world

has need of those who are showing us God, not so much by what they say, as by what they are. All the theological libraries that were ever built are not worth one being of the moral stature of Jesus. If I want to know what God is like I do not go to some self-satisfied doctrine-monger, I go to the man whose life is consecrated to great ends and whose selfhood is swallowed up in his passionate devotion to the cause he has chosen to serve. If I cannot see God in that I shall never see Him at all. Somehow, the great heart of the world vibrates and responds to every such manifestation of the truth; the whole level of the common life is raised and glorified by the impact of one great soul upon it. This is the world's hope. It will never be saved by anything else. All the misery in London to-day is but the cry of soul hunger. "Give ye them to eat." God wants you to be, to your little corner of the vast total, just what Jesus was to the toilers who gathered round Him in the days of long ago. Jesus was poor; it was but little of this world's goods that He ever had to part with. But He gave *Himself*, freely, ungrudgingly, untiringly; and in that man-giving people saw and began to believe in the love of God. There is no other way in which the love of God ever shows itself to a needy world. Try it, and see how it will strengthen and satisfy your own soul. Do not be content to be God's beneficiary; be His messenger. When man in his weakness and evil-doing cries out for God, give him God; He is yours to give. When the weary and heavy-laden seek for divine strength, offer it to them; they will soon find out that they

have it already from the same source as you. When anguish and heart-break cry out for help and healing, minister both in the name of the Lord. "Freely ye have received, freely give." Let the sad and lonely see God in you if they cannot see Him anywhere else. Feed them with the bread of life.

I feel that in dealing with a text like this there is a great danger of talking mere cant. That is always the danger with familiar Scripture sayings, and the more we spiritualise them the more likely are we to miss their practical significance, unless we see that a spiritual principle makes an uncompromising moral demand. Now here is just where the danger of the spiritual interpretation of this passage comes in. I have shown you that it does not refer directly to physical but to spiritual food, and some of you may be very glad to hear it. You may be thinking that that makes it rather easier to practise. Well, do not make a mistake about that. The truth is that the spiritual instead of the literal interpretation throws upon you an obligation which cannot be avoided. You might say, and would be quite justified in saying, that it was all very well for Jesus to work a miracle in feeding a hungry multitude, and that under such circumstances you would be quite willing, like His old-time disciples, to take the bread from His hands and pass it on. But this is not what happens. The poor we have always with us, and they are not fed by miracle. We may give of our substance, but we do not find it increase by the distribution. How delightful, then, to think that we were never meant to give real

bread, but only spiritual testimony, or loyalty to the faith, or joy in the Holy Ghost, or something equally unsubstantial!

Humbug and nonsense! This is just how the average representative of the Church of Christ has been talking for ages, and a pretty mess he has made of things. If Jesus came amongst us to-day in the flesh, do you think His own church would recognise and receive Him gladly? No, it would not. It would regard Him as a dangerous revolutionary engaged in upsetting the established order both in Church and State. He would see now, as He saw before, that the majority of the professors of religion prefer the easiest way of serving God. Oh, don't be deceived into thinking that because this feeding of the multitude was no physical miracle that you and I are going to be let off more easily. The other day some one sent me a poem,[1] the first verse of which ran thus:—

> If Jesus came to London,
> Came to London to-day,
> He would not go to the West End,
> He would come down our way;
> He would talk with the children dancing
> To the organ out in the street,
> And say He was their big Brother,
> And give them something to eat.

Well, now, I don't think He would do exactly this. I don't think He would suppose that charity would meet the case, and, if He did, He would not have very much to give away. The East End of London would be too much for Him. He would

[1] *Jesus in London.* By E. Nesbit (A. C. Fifield), 7*d.* net.

have to work a fresh miracle every morning if He were to give the poor enough to eat. And, moreover, if He met the case in that way the result would be demoralising at both ends of the social scale. It would be so nice to all of us to see the poor fed without any trouble either on our part or theirs. In a small way this is what we have been doing all along. We have been giving doles out of our abundance, but we shriek with anger and terror whenever we are told that most of what we are giving was not ours to begin with. No, I don't think Jesus would attack things that way. I think He would strike straight and hard at the causes which are making poverty and degradation and keeping rich and poor apart in our modern world:—

Then He'd say, "What's the good of churches
When these have nowhere to sleep;
And how can I hear you praying
When they are cursing so deep?
I gave My blood and My body
That they might have bread and wine,
And you have taken your share and theirs
Of these good gifts of Mine!

"I've got nothing new to tell you;
You know what I always said.
But you've built their bones into churches
And stolen their wine and bread.
You, with My name on your foreheads,
Liar, and traitor, and knave,
You have lived by the death of your brothers—
These whom I died to save."

Yes, this is what Jesus would do. He would expose the hollow sham of giving people good advice while continuing to profit by their material disabilities. He would scorn us for trying to put

sticking plaster on a running sore. He would bid us probe to the bottom of the things which are making want, sorrow, despair, and broken hearts. He would make us ashamed of ourselves that we had never faced the situation more thoroughly and honestly before. He would strike straight at the root of our selfishness, and say: "Give ye them to eat! Give, give, give, of your own blood and soul for the righting of the wrong, for the destruction of the evil system by which the thousands suffer that the few may enjoy; give *yourself*, not merely the cheese-parings of your material substance." And then we should begin to wonder if we ever knew before what the gospel was all about, and every one of us would pray: "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

A few days ago, as no doubt most of you read in the papers at the time, an artist and his wife were found drowned in the Thames. They had chosen that mode of death because the struggle to live was too much for them. Here were people of refinement and culture, brought up in good circumstances, able to produce beautiful things to gladden the common life, and yet they perished for want of bread. They left a pathetic letter behind them, thanking the two or three people who had been kind to them, but saying they had found the world a hard and cruel place to live in. As they had lived and loved and suffered together, they thought they would die together. I suppose there are some people who would say that these two poor things have gone to hell. Well, if so, it could not be much worse than the hell they have left. Who makes that

hell? You and I make it—not willingly, perhaps, but thoughtlessly and selfishly. We let the forces go on unchecked which make such a hell inevitable for thousands upon thousands of our fellow-creatures. If we had only known in time, there is not a man or woman in this congregation who would not have given his or her last crust to save these victims of our industrial anarchy from the slow torture and pitiful end of which we have been hearing now. But for one of whom you hear in this way there are a thousand of whom you don't and never will. What are we going to do about them? "Give ye them to eat." But we have not the means; we have barely enough for ourselves! Just so; and if you gave it all away you would not have solved the problem. But give yourself; give the bread of your own life. Give the spirit of comradeship. Get to know what is wrong, and do not spare yourself in the consecrated endeavour to put it right. You can easily find out what to do if you only want to find out. Why, in this very congregation at this moment there are sad hearts and weary brains caused by this same struggle for the meat which perisheth. Yes, even here. Here are men and women bearing up bravely and sadly against the sordid pressure of conditions which are crushing them down and driving them into the ranks of hopeless failures. I know from experience that when this sermon is over, and I go into my vestry, I shall be met with first one appeal and then another for assistance which I am unable to render. I cannot work a miracle. I sometimes feel as though everybody in England tries me first when help is

wanted for this cause or that, or this or yonder suffering individual, and every one that comes seems to think that he or she is the only one who has ever thought of such a thing. But I know quite well what is wanted. What is wanted is that we should rise up together and say: It is not the will of God that men should go under in misery and despair. It is not the will of God that they should continue to struggle against one another, and hamper and hinder one another. It is the will of God that we should get together and help and encourage one another in the march of life. Jesus came to show us how to do it, and the spirit in which He lived His life and died His death is the one hope of the world. This is the reason why men feel Him to be their brother and their Lord. They do not want miracles; they want the bread of life that they may eat and be filled. Oh, children of the living God, rise up in your sovereign strength, and realise the ideal of Jesus, the union of all who love in the service of all who suffer. Strive earnestly to fulfil the prayer of Jesus, "That they all may be one."

IX

THE HATE THAT IS LOVE

"If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple."—LUKE xiv. 26.

THIS is one of the hard sayings of Jesus, and if we were now hearing it for the first time, apart from the authority of His great name, we should probably consider it the utterance of a madman. If there be one sentence in the whole Bible which forbids a literal interpretation it is this. On the face of it, it seems to inculcate a fanatical indifference to the claims of ordinary filial duty and affection, not to speak of the obligations implied in being members of a civilised society. It is because we are used to it that we pass lightly over its difficulties, and content ourselves with explanations which are not explanations at all. The truth is, that we have here one of the profoundest and most uncompromising assertions ever made as to the necessity for self-renunciation if we would know the inner meaning of life. It is one of those magnificent paradoxes in which the greatest teacher the world has ever known lays bare the secret of His own power over evil. Let us try, following

the guidance of His teaching as a whole, to understand what He means by a test so searching and so apparently cruel as this.

The first thing to notice is that Jesus' own behaviour negatives any possibility of putting a harsh interpretation upon these words. He certainly did not hate any one, least of all His own mother. The Being who took little children up in His arms and blessed them was hardly likely to curse them in the next breath; and the fact that He was able to see the beauty of child life at all is proof positive that he was no inhuman enthusiast carried away by religious zeal to such an extent as to repudiate all earthly ties. The episodes in His ministry when He showed Himself tender and gentle to children and women, in an age when both were treated with scant respect, seem to have greatly impressed His followers. It was not on one occasion only that He showed this side of His character, but on many. His illustrations from child life were frequent. The incident about setting a little child in the midst of quarrelling men and telling them that they must become like that child in order to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven was no isolated one; when we compare the gospel narratives the conclusion appears irresistible that He often acted in this way, so often indeed that His disciples ceased to be astonished thereat. "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones, for I say unto you that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father." "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your

Father which is in heaven give the Holy Spirit unto them that ask Him?" Not much suggestion here about hating your own children—the very opposite; Jesus here declares the sacredness of child life, and illustrates the Fatherhood of God from what His hearers already knew of the fatherhood of man.

On the question of the treatment of women Jesus set the standard for all time. How marvellous was His insight may be judged from the fact that, at a time, and among a people, when female incontinence was punished with the most merciless severity, the only recorded words of Jesus in reference to that particular offence are words of compassion. This is really striking, for although nineteen centuries have passed away, His attitude on this question is still far from being that of the average man; if Jesus were beginning His ministry now I am afraid we should call Him a trifler with morals; and, even if we wished Him well, we should warn Him to be more careful in His references to this social evil—the truth being, of course, that on questions of sex morality we are still in the dark ages when man regarded woman as his chattel. Jesus knew, and did not hesitate to say, that there were worse offences against the well-being of humanity than that of the poor woman who became the victim of man's cruelty and lust. The story told in the first eleven verses of the eighth of John about the woman taken in adultery is quite likely to be true, although it is a fragment of tradition which does not belong to the gospel wherein it is found. If so, think of all that was

implied in the quietly spoken but scorching words, "Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone at her"—that particular sin, mind you. If Jesus were here to-day in the flesh and saw a poor, disgraced, heartbroken girl standing alone in a felon's dock to answer to the charge of having taken the life of her illegitimate child, while the man who had ruined her, and whose name was privately known to judge and jury, went scot free, what would He say to us? There is not much doubt about the answer to that question. There was one occasion when He exposed Himself to scorn and false judgment for allowing Himself to be touched by a woman of the streets, and His only word in justification was, "She loved much." There is more in that short sentence than meets the eye. How much did Jesus know of that poor blighted life? Here was a woman whose destruction, probably, was caused by the fact that she loved "not wisely but too well." She was outcast now, to all but Jesus. Did His chivalrous defence of her sound like an exhortation to hate? No, indeed; even in the case of one who had wandered very far from the path of purity and truth Jesus had nothing but compassion and even a measure of respect.

But when we come to womanhood as represented by His own mother the case is clearer. This text of ours springs out of a deep and poignant experience through which Jesus was passing at the moment when He uttered it. It has sometimes been stated that Jesus felt deeply the opposition of His own kindred to the work He had under-

taken, and their inability to perceive His fitness for it. Look at the sarcastic counsel, "If Thou do these things show Thyself to the world"—"For neither did His brethren believe on Him." The time came when they thought He was mad, a disgrace and danger to the family, and went out to bring Him home by force. It was on this occasion that Jesus uttered the remarkable saying which is Mark's only equivalent for the one which forms our text, and which certainly sounds like a repudiation of His own mother. "Who is My mother; and who are My brethren?" and turning to His disciples He said, "Behold My mother and My brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother." Even this is not hating, nor an exhortation to hate, but it sounds very much like a determination to break all bonds of earthly relationship. Think of the poor mother outside the door hearing such words as these! I have not the slightest doubt that the incident took place, for in varying forms it is recorded in all three of the older gospels. This must have been a trying period for Jesus, a time when He felt that fidelity to His vocation involved utter loneliness and misunderstanding. His family were to be pitied, too, especially His mother. Women are religiously more conservative, perhaps, and more amenable to authority than men. To them a doctrine or an institution is sacred because venerable. To see Jesus tearing away the very foundations of the system of belief and practice in which she had been reared must to her have been painful in the extreme. Her very love for

Him would fill her with alarm at what He was doing. All her life she had been accustomed to respect the synagogue and all it stood for, as well as the authority of scribe and Pharisee. She became anxious and frightened when Jesus challenged the whole position, and went and preached to publicans and sinners. He had always been a good son, but who was He to set Himself up against His preceptors? True, they were not all that could be desired; they were seldom very spiritual; sometimes they were cunning and grasping; but then they were powerful; why attack them? After all, they had been there for centuries and were of divine institution. This dear child of hers must not fling Himself into antagonism with them. Above all, He must not become disreputable by associating with irreligious people. The neighbours were beginning to talk, and to point the finger of scorn at the home out of which He had come. She must save Him; she must remonstrate; she knew He was good, but was He wise? We can imagine how the soul of this simple Jewish mother was torn with conflicting emotions at this time, and how Jesus missed her sympathy even when she was trying to give it. We may be quite sure that there was many a sad conversation between the two before He finally had to leave Nazareth and find a refuge among strangers. Tradition says Joseph was dead, and probably tradition is right. There could be no home for Jesus in Nazareth after that humiliating hour when His old neighbours tried to take His life. He found more sympathy and help elsewhere. Mark, this

does not mean, and could not mean, that Mary ever consciously failed her Son; but the indications at this part of the ministry of Jesus all point to the fact that He felt Himself misunderstood and isolated from His own kindred. He lived in Capernaum because He was driven from Nazareth. Hence it was that in bitterness of heart He once replied to the outburst of an enthusiastic would-be follower: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head." This is a very real bit of human history. When we read the gospels now-a-days we are apt to forget that it was possible, or that Jesus had ordinary human feelings. The time came when this temporary estrangement passed, and it says a good deal for the true spirituality of the humble family at Nazareth that, although they were not found among the followers of Jesus when His popularity was greatest, they belonged to the persecuted band of disciples upon whom the Holy Ghost came after His death. His brother James was the head of the church at Jerusalem, and His mother belonged to that little company too. I am glad the evangelist did not forget to tell us that she was not far away when He hung dying on Calvary. If tradition is to be believed His last thought in that hour of anguish was for His mother.

You can now see, I hope, something of the immediate circumstances out of which this startling saying sprang. Jesus spoke of hating, but He was no hater; He simply used the strongest term he could find to express the greatness of the

sacrifice that was demanded of one who would follow and obey the truth of God without flinching or swerving. Let me illustrate the matter from what most of you know of a Jewish or Roman Catholic family to-day. Let a Jew become a Christian or a Catholic become a Protestant, and it is as though all his roots have been torn up and his soul transplanted to a foreign soil. Is that an easy thing? There are few of us who dare face it; it tears away the whole background of life, and makes the convert feel like a stranger in a strange land. It is not merely a question of change of opinion; it goes far deeper than that; it is a change of the whole spiritual environment. It requires enormous strength of character and depth of conviction to take such a step. If that is so to-day, when Christianity is both venerable and powerful, what must it have been to Jesus when He had none to advise Him but God, and was not going to join a fresh community but to make one. As Dr. Martineau finely says, "With Him as with us all it was no doubt difficult so long as He was amid the ways of common life to believe in the stirring of a divine call within Him." I am sure that must have been true. I picture the grand, lonely soul of Jesus facing the future as He looked back on the associations He had loved so dearly, and where He had learned the most He knew of God. I can see Him facing the crisis with resolute mien, and yet asking Himself solemnly and sadly whether it was really demanded of Him that He should wound His dearest and break with all that bound Him to the past. But He did it; He did it as bravely and

decidedly as though His mother and His brothers were the very personification of evil instead of the nearest and dearest on earth. This was what He meant when He spoke about hating them and even hating His own life. If they or His own self-interest stood in the way of His divine work they were to be sacrificed as uncompromisingly as though they were the very legions of hell. Do you think that cost Him nothing? Why, this whole section of Scripture springs out of His own living experience. He speaks of sitting down and counting the cost; He knew what that meant. He tells us about laying a foundation, and not being able to finish. But He did finish; the being who was willing to give up respect and love, friends and home, in order to carry a spiritual gospel to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, was capable of meeting the last ordeal when it came. Jesus had carried His cross for many a long day before ever He reached Calvary, and this text of ours tells of one of the bitterest and heaviest of them all.

What was it that led Jesus to this momentous decision? What was the vital issue between Him and the custodians of the ancient faith in which He Himself had been trained? We ought to try to gain a clear idea of the actual situation in order to appreciate to the full the intensity of the declaration which forms our text. I do not hesitate to say therefore that it was precisely the one with which Christendom is confronted to-day. It was the issue between formalism and reality in religion. Jesus saw that the law had become a bondage, although originally it had been the expression of

living faith; so He deliberately broke through its precepts in order to fulfil its spirit. He did what Luther did fifteen hundred years afterwards. He threw men back upon the immediacy and inwardness of communion with God. Where others appealed to the authority of the letter He appealed to the authority of conscience. He did not value in the least the externals of worship, but only simplicity and purity of heart. It was the age-long duel between the outer and the inner, the formal and the real, the letter and the spirit. Jesus declared His teaching to be self-evident, and so it was, but they killed Him for it. And yet somehow I cannot help thinking that for Him the bitterness of death was passed when He took the bold step of breaking with the traditions of His fathers and the prejudices of His kindred rather than be false to His vision. He saw plainly what the world needed; He knew that God had called Him to say it; and, though it tore His heart asunder, He allowed no personal and private affection to stand in the way of the due fulfilment of His divine commission. Well might He say, as He was entitled to say, "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and he that taketh not his cross and followeth after Me cannot be My disciple." He was asking no more from His followers than He had already done Himself.

How often in Christian history the same issue has arisen! There is no harder kind of self-sacrifice than that which involves to an extent the sacrifice of others against their own will. It is this which has broken many a strong man down, and

caused many a lover of truth to turn back and walk with it no more. And yet, whenever such a sacrifice has been made, as Jesus made it, it has been the evidence of a higher love than the most beautiful domestic bliss can ever show. It is a love which springs from a nearer vision of the heart of God; it has a flaming grandeur that obscures all meaner delights. You have all read of Bunyan and his poor blind child, and how in his prison cell his keenest torture was the thought of her helplessness deprived of her natural protector. "Poor child," he wrote, "how hard it is like to go with thee in this world! Thou must be beaten, must beg, must suffer cold, and want, and nakedness; and yet I cannot endure that even the wind should blow upon thee." Yet he remained in prison for Christ's sake, and nothing could induce him to violate his conscience or promise silence where he knew he ought to speak. The little one could not know all that her privation was costing her father. Happily Bunyan had a brave and noble wife, who did understand. But the understanding is not usually so near home. "A man's foes shall be they of his own household," said Jesus, and He spoke out of the bitter depths of His own experience. You all remember the scene in *Robert Elsmere*, where the clergyman has to face matters out with a wife who is to him as his own soul, but who fails to see the truth that had summoned him with imperious hand. Here are the pathetic words in which he makes his confession:—"You were there beside me, and you could not help me. I dared not tell you about it; I could only struggle

on alone, so terribly alone, sometimes; and now I am beaten, beaten. And I come to ask you to help me in the only thing that remains to me. Help me to be an honest man—to follow conscience—to say and do the truth!" But the poor, stricken wife, as brave and firm in her way as he, could only gasp out that she did not understand. Presently, when she did understand, or thought she understood, she pleaded with him, and then cut herself off from him. She tortured him by using the argument of earthly love, ere, in her own pitiful loyalty to a higher love, she went away and left him to bear his burden alone. The value of such a story as that is to be found in the fact that it presents with dramatic intensity the ever-recurring tragedy of faith. Here were two souls, each glimpsing the highest, and separating from each other in their fidelity to what they severally saw, though only to meet again on the level above all shadows.

This is one of God's ways of turning love into glory and making truth to be part of ourselves. For no such sacrifice has ever been made that in the long run has meant the loss of anything worth retaining. He who is capable of it draws nearer to what he has renounced, sees it in a new and more sacred light, and clasps it again on the resurrection morning.

These reflections now move me to try to speak in the name of this same Christ to the deepest and best in every man and woman before me at this moment. You all know well those turning-points in life when we have to choose between a higher

and a lower good, a larger and a lesser love. These choices are usually very painful, and it is often difficult to see which way to take. When the final decision has to be made it is sometimes like tearing the flesh from one's bones; to do the right thing you have to hurt some one, and this is a very much harder matter than being hurt yourself. Well, here is your rule of action: Jesus bids you see in the light of God what you ought to do, and then do it with the same undaunted front that you would wear if your conflict were with the devil himself. Reject the lower good as firmly and uncompromisingly as though it were positive evil; choose the higher love as strongly as though you hated the lower. However hard it may be to obey God's voice when a moral decision becomes a tragedy, go through with it, and you will find in the end that you have chosen the best even for him or her to whom you have given the most pain.

This profound spiritual experience may be lived out on a very restricted scale, but may be none the less real for that. Take the case of a man who knows of a wrong committed by his own child, the declaration of which will bring public disgrace both upon that child and his own good name. What is he to do? There stands the wrong, a black and sinister barrier between him and truth. Some one else is having to bear the consequences of it, perhaps the blame for it. There is but one thing to do: he must sacrifice that child. He must offer him on the altar of the eternal righteousness, even though in so doing he is offering himself a hundredfold more. He cannot spare, if he really loves;

the particular must be yielded to the universal, the smaller to the vaster good—and all else be left to God. Or take the fidelity to principle which occasionally means in the cruel industrial world of to-day the flinging of wife and children under the Juggernaut car of financial ruin. There are men in this congregation at this moment who are so placed in business that they would expose an infamy to-morrow and walk out of their situation with a clear conscience, but the thing wears a different aspect when it becomes a question of hungry mouths at home. It is all very well to do the heroic thing, but is it well to compel the baby to take the consequences too? You have no fear for yourself; few men have; but we are all fettered more or less by the sweet relationships of home and fireside which carry with them such tremendous responsibilities. So you just put up with the foul practice, whatever it is, and go on day after day acting a lie. I know nothing more terrible in the modern world than this moral antinomy. There you sit—straight, clean-living, high-souled men—knowing quite well that every day of your life you are having to jeopardise your self-respect and are tempted to do things which in your heart of hearts you feel to be base and iniquitous. You know better than I know that industrial life is shot through and through with fraud and pretence; that much of it is sheer dead robbery; that at the best it is cruel and unjust, and bears hardly upon the weak and unfortunate. You have to steel your heart as well as your conscience. You dismiss a man because you cannot afford to keep him,

regardless of the fact that your self-preservation and that of your family means privation and suffering to him and his. Or you step into another man's place when opportunity offers, knowing as you do so that the chances are the man you have supplanted will never regain his footing. It is the fortune of war, and war it is. You do not care to think too much about it, for, if you do, you are weakened for effective action. So you just go on like soldiers on a battlefield, doing your best to destroy your fellow-man against whom you feel no animosity; and then, if you are a victor in the strife, pausing to bind up the wounds of one here and there and carrying them to hospital. Is not the situation intolerable? You know it is. And the worst of it is that it tends to become demoralising. A youngster sets out with high ideals, but soon finds out that if he is to get on he must drop them or only air them now and then. He learns in time when they are in place and when they are not. He is told that business is business, and comes to take it for granted that that means playing for your own hand. Some people can settle down to it comfortably and without a qualm, go on fighting all the week, and sing hymns about brotherly love on Sunday. Others cannot; and that is just where the tragedy of the situation comes in. What can one man do? He may dare everything on his own account, but there are some he loves better than himself.

Now, my dear fellow-citizens, let me put the issue plainly before you. I feel keenly the difficulty, even the seeming cruelty, of speaking from a

sheltered position to those who are under fire; but I am only a tongue; it is not I that speak, it is this Christ of ages long gone by. Had He a right to speak or had He not? Has He ever asked a man to do anything He did not do Himself? Moreover, I wish to make it clear that I would not dare to tell any one of you your duty in detail; I cannot possibly take your place and see with your eyes—no, not if you were to tell me everything you know and feel; I can only declare a principle and leave you to work it out. Sometimes a minister of a Nonconformist church, or an Anglican clergyman, or even a Roman priest, has written or come to me telling me that he dare not deliver his whole soul for fear of deacons, or bishop, or pope, as the case may be. It is not for himself he fears, but there are those whose lives are intertwined with his in such a way as to complicate his problem and make it infinitely perplexing. He has to think about something else besides the luxury of free speech. What is to be done? Is he to fling all reserve to the winds and speak out, regardless of the pain and loss his decision will inflict upon others? I invariably answer that I do not know; that question can only be fought out alone with God, each for himself. But every man knows well enough the difference between compromising with the face to the light and with the back to it. There are men in our pulpits to-day who have forfeited all claim to respect because they say in private what they dare not say in public, and their deceit deserves that name because they seek only to stand well with their particular world. God help

them! "Verily I say unto you they have their reward."

But how utterly different with you men who are every day being forced to see more and more clearly the irreconcilable antagonism between the ideal of Jesus and the maxims of modern industrialism! You cannot shut your eyes to it, and no priest can absolve you from the duty of settling your own attitude towards it. You know just what is wrong; you know just what is wanted to put it right. But what can you do alone? Can a mouse defy a steam hammer? Have you counted the cost of trying to live as though Christ were not only the Master of your life but the life itself? Have you heard God speak to you as He spoke to Him? Have you realised what it will mean if you dare to do what your conscience says you ought to do? It means not only that you may be a failure, as the world counts success, but that your failure will cause suffering and loss to some who are dearer to you than your own soul. Do you know what it is to arouse the anger of those who fail to see what you see or who profit by that which you condemn? Most of the Pharisees were honest enough in their indignation with Jesus; pretty nearly every successful man of business will honestly regard you as a pestilential nuisance if you interfere with things he has taken for granted all through his career. Do you understand that there is no lie so difficult to destroy as the lie which good people have come to regard as truth? Can you imagine what is involved in arousing the sincere hostility of your whole world? Dare you face suspicion, ridicule,

contempt, misrepresentation? Above all, can you bring yourself to cause pain where your heart feels nothing but respect and love? Can you bring yourself to fight a good man with as much determination and unsparing zeal as though he were a bad man? Are you prepared to defy the temptation of becoming powerful in order to do good later —that subtle ingenuity which has been the overthrow of so many of God's heroes, and which Jesus rejected at the very outset of His brief earthly ministry? Do you see where to begin, and are you not afraid? Has God spoken to you so plainly that your work lies clear before you? Then go and do it, no matter how much the love you put into it looks like hate. Do not wait to ask what other people are doing or why you should have your little bit of duty thrust upon you: do it, as unto the Lord.

This is a far truer, nobler gospel than that which bids us owe everything to Jesus without seeking to offer ourselves as He did, for precisely the same end. The discipleship of reverent gratitude to Jesus is a poor thing compared with the discipleship that shares His Cross. Most people are prepared to be God's beneficiaries, but only a few are willing to be God's pioneers. You know now which of these are really of the fellowship of Jesus.

X

THE MASTER ON THE SHORE

"When the morning was now come Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus."—JOHN xxi. 4.

ON Sunday morning last, in dealing with the subject of communion with the living Christ, as illustrated in the experience of the apostle Paul, I made a passing reference to the episode presumed in our text. It has since occurred to me that that episode is itself worthy of careful examination, for it contains much that is both helpful and suggestive. It is indeed a remarkable piece of writing from many points of view. Before we proceed to inquire into the meaning of the text itself I wish to be quite sure that we all recognise the true character of the chapter in which it appears.

It is my custom when preaching from the fourth gospel to point out to my hearers that this is a much greater book than most people realise. We inhabitants of the Western world are unaccustomed to this kind of literature, which belongs to a different age and a different mode of thinking from our own. We like things as simple and straightforward as possible, even when the subject is abstruse; we do not care for veiled allusions and mysterious

significations. The Anglo-Saxon mind, generally speaking, does not greatly appreciate even imaginative Celtic writings like those of Fiona Macleod. A few may, but the majority do not. We are far too busy, and far too practical, and—may I add?—far too stolid, to be able to appreciate that kind of thing in any high degree. You business men of London must not be offended if I say that I hardly think most of you are, either by training or temperament, likely to understand such a book as this fourth gospel without a good deal of careful instruction. And yet if you once get the key to it you will find it more helpful and interesting than any of the other three.

It is not history, and never was intended to be understood as history. It contains historical elements, but these are always used as the picture language of great ideas; this is the writer's method all through, and was quite in accordance with the whole school in which he had been trained. It is more than probable that there was at one time a large literature in existence of the same general character as this gospel. Understand, then, when you read this book, that every saying it contains, and every incident it relates, has an inner spiritual meaning. The book is a connected whole, but every separate saying is profound and complete. For instance, there are no parables in this gospel, and the miracles recorded are for the most part quite different from those in the other gospels. The very first one, the turning of water into wine, is not alluded to elsewhere; and as for the raising of Lazarus, which we might suppose to have been

the most astounding of all, not a word is said about it in the older gospels. The truth is that in this gospel the miracles are parables, and every one of them is designed to bring out some special aspect of spiritual truth.

This is certainly the case with the story which contains our text. But here let me remark that, although this twenty-first chapter follows the method of the rest of the book, and is written in the same style, it is probably a later addition. If you look carefully you will see that the gospel ends quite naturally with the closing verse of the twentieth chapter in the words: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." After this very suitable ending, the twenty-first chapter proceeds to tell of some *other* doings of Jesus, and concludes in its turn: "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." The reason for the addition of this twenty-first chapter is, I think, fairly clear. It did not come into existence until after the Christian Church had settled down into something like unity of organisation, and with a strongly marked apostolic tradition. By this time Peter had come to be looked upon as having been the leader of the apostolic band, and the custodian of an authority which probably he did not exercise in his lifetime. We now begin to hear of the power of the keys, the binding

and loosing, and such-like; and it was only a matter of time before this tendency produced a full-blown hierarchy with Peter as the traditional first bishop of Rome and forerunner of all the Popes. This little fragment of scripture is therefore of much later date than most of the New Testament writings. It follows the general plan of the fourth gospel in its careful use of symbolism. You observe that Peter says to the other disciples, "I go a-fishing." It is Peter who says it, and the rest who follow. They are fishers of men, and their ship is the Church. For some time they meet with no success: it is dark, and they toil in vain. Evidently this reference is to a period of persecution when the flow of conversions was temporarily checked. But now comes a beautiful suggestion. The authorised version of our text says: "When the morning was now come." The revised rendering is better—"When the day was now breaking Jesus stood on the shore; but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus." He tells them to cast their net on the right side of the ship, and they shall find. They do so; and immediately enclose a great multitude of fishes, "and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken." The suggestion thus beautifully made is that it is Jesus Himself who directs the operations of His servants from that shore which lies beyond the troubled sea of life. They cannot see Him, although they obey the voice that speaks within their own souls, but they are able to recognise Him in the tokens of blessings that follow from obedience. Evidently this passage was written before there was any breach in the formal unity of the

visible church. It could not be written now, unless the writer were prepared to ignore formal unity and look for something higher.

Now let me be perfectly frank with you in discussing the message contained in this sentence and its context. I want to discard the outer husk of ecclesiasticism, and get to the inner kernel of spiritual experience. To be honest I suppose we must confess that to most of the Christians, at the time when this passage was written, the Church had come to be looked upon as the ark of salvation into which souls must be gathered in order to be saved from the destruction which was to overtake the world. The symbolism does not hold perfectly good, for of course the fish are being taken out of their natural element and put to death in being caught by the fishermen; but this is not the only place where the same figure is employed. You will find it in Matthew xiii. in the parable of the drag-net. It appears again in Luke v. in a story which is almost an exact parallel to the one in this chapter except that the multitude of fishes was so great that the net broke. We must just take the figure as it stands. The Church was supposed to be God's appointed means of saving a few out of a wicked world. Jesus was directing the fishing operations from heaven, and His divinely appointed ministers in the ship called the Church rendered willing obedience to the guidance of His Spirit. I do not want to take that point of view, for it has long since ceased to be true in any real sense. I do not wonder that at a time when human society seemed to be falling to pieces men should have

despaired of the world and thought of the Christian Church as the only living hope for a remnant of the human race. I am not sure that we ought to be confident in affirming that the Christians from the first ever expected to be able to save the world or even the majority of mankind; I am afraid it must be admitted that they only believed they would be able to save a comparative few. They supposed that these few would inherit the earth. Later on, when it was found that Christ did not come as speedily as had been anticipated, they began to think of these few as inheriting a home in heaven, and of the earth-world as having to be utterly destroyed. If you had lived in that day you would have taken the same view. I see that Mr. Balfour in delivering the Henry Sidgwick memorial lecture the other day drew attention to this point. He remarked that the overthrow of the elaborate civilisation of Greece and Rome by the influx of barbarism must have seemed to the thoughtful minds of the time the most melancholy thing that had ever happened. It was a long drawn-out agony. Little by little, but inevitably, the old splendour was submerged by brute ignorance and savage vandalism. It must have been hard for persons of refinement to be other than pessimistic as they watched the process of obliteration going on. Nor did the curtain of gloom lift again for more than a thousand years. The Renaissance gave the first sign of a reawakening of the human spirit from the darkness of superstition, but not even the Renaissance could be properly described as a rehabilitation of the intellectual achievements

of the ancient world; the Europe of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was the scene of devastating religious wars, bitter intolerance, and fiendish cruelty done in the name of God. That was the period of the massacre of Saint Bartholomew and the fires of Smithfield. We may say with perfect truth that it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that a civilisation began to appear which was at all comparable to that of ancient Greece and Rome in their best days. As Alfred Russel Wallace has pointed out in his book, *The Wonderful Century,* man achieved greater progress in his power over Nature during that fifty years than in the two millenniums preceding. Some people deny that our intellectual and moral progress has kept pace with the material; but, be that as it may, hardly any one would seriously contend that the world-wide civilisation of to-day is not vastly more complex and full of promise than any that has gone before. It contains richer and more varied elements, and exhibits potentialities undreamed of in the world of Plato and Aristotle.

You see then what the world must have looked like to the Christians at the time my text was written. They thought of it as a stormy sea on which rode the ship of the Church of Jesus. And this estimate was not unjust, for, amid the crash of falling institutions, the only fabric which stood firm was the Church. Into this, as to an ark of refuge, thousands upon thousands of people hurried who had come to despair of the world as it then was. And their instinct was quite accurate. The old order was changing and passing away, but no one

could see the new. Christianity alone held out the hope of a better world to be. Men came to trust and reverence the Church. They admired its unity and strength, its confidence in its God-given mission, its authoritative declaration of the lordship of Christ. New heresies sprang up every day, but their only result seemed to be to render the evangel of the Church stronger and more confident than ever, and her power over the human mind greater than before—"for all there were so many yet was not the net broken." The almost inevitable outcome of these tendencies was the establishment of the great mediæval Roman Church, which continued unbroken down to the Reformation, and is still powerful in our midst to-day. We may willingly concede that during the ages of barbarism this ecclesiastical discipline did good and necessary work, the work of the school-master and the law-giver; the mistake that so many people have made, both within and without the borders of Christianity, has been the identification of ecclesiasticism with the religion of Jesus. We see the beginnings of that tendency in the story which contains my text. We see how those beginnings arose; but, now that the whole order of things which made them possible has passed away, it is time for the world to take a healthier and saner view. The great problem before the civilisation of the immediate future is the attitude it must adopt towards the vital truths of religion. Are we to have done with Jesus, now that the curtain is rising upon a fairer world than that of old Rome, or will He still lead the van of human progress? There can be no juggling with

this question, and no avoiding it. We have come to the parting of the ways. The priest is impossible, ecclesiastical systems are crumbling into dust before our eyes; the main current of human interest is setting away from the Church instead of towards it. Is it setting away from Christ?

This question appears to me so all-important that I do not see how any thoughtful man can afford to pass it by. The moral and social situation in the world of to-day is in some respects the exact reverse of what it was at the time my text came into being. Secular civilisation was dying then, and the only live society was the Church; now it is the Church that is dying, and society is springing into new life. By the Church I mean, for the moment, ecclesiastical Christianity. What are we to say about this? Note how serious-minded men inside the Church are talking to-day almost precisely as serious-minded men outside the Church were talking seventeen or eighteen hundred years ago. Scholars and thinkers were pessimistic then because old philosophies and old faiths were disappearing, and the only religion with any force in it was the rude uncultured Christianity which was sweeping the poor and ignorant into its fold. You have only to read the literature of the time to see that I am perfectly faithful to the facts. See how these very facts are repeating themselves now. Now it is the Christians who are talking that way. Men of light and leading are deploring the decay of faith, and the rise of what they call materialism. They cannot ignore the fact that the moral and social aspirations of the people in all the countries

of the civilised world have little or nothing to do with organised Christianity. They fear for the future; they dread the advent of a democracy without soul; they watch the inevitable decline of Church authority with the gravest concern.

But are the tendencies precisely what they appear to be? I am quite sure they are not. On the contrary, I hold that the decay of organised religion means the release of the true spirit of Christianity from its swaddling clothes. I do not believe that there ever has been a more hopeful time for true spiritual religion in all the history of mankind than the time in which we are living now. Jesus sowed a seed nineteen hundred years ago which has taken long to germinate in darkness and pain; now we are beginning to see the ripening unto harvest. If the Church is to survive she must learn to cast the net on the right side of the ship. Unfortunately many of those who exercise power and authority both in Catholic and Protestant Christendom have hitherto failed to see which *is* the right side of the ship. They toil hard in the darkness, and mourn the coming of the light which means the passing of influence and opportunity. They watch the world slipping out of their grasp, and pathetically fail to understand that it is not slipping out of the grasp of God. And, strangest of all, they do not recognise that voice that comes out of the shadows at the breaking day, and tells them where and how to fish for the souls of men. They know not that it is the voice of Jesus, the Jesus who still watches and works from the farther shore. But a still more remarkable thing is the way in which the world is

learning to obey that voice without knowing any more than the Church whose voice it is. One section of Christendom ignorantly hears and disobeys, not knowing their Lord; the other section has never known Him, but it knows the spirit which makes for the deliverance of mankind from the bondage of sorrow and wrong. Surely the day will come when these shall recognise, with a knowledge which neither ecclesiastic nor atheist can obscure, that He to whom the lowly came in ages long gone by is speaking still, and that "the common people hear Him gladly."

It is only a question of time. There is a movement of the Spirit going on all over the world today, the true significance of which is only dimly apparent. In the Church of Rome it is being denounced as Modernism. In Protestant countries it is dreaded as Humanism, Socialism, and what not. But it is always the same movement, and his eyes are dull who cannot see that it is the Spirit of God moving once more upon the face of the waters. Even the so-called materialism and irreligion with which it is frequently associated are in essence spiritual; they are the flame of the new life, the life of moral earnestness allied to human sympathy. It is the gospel of happiness which is being preached with a new assurance by strenuous and self-sacrificing servants of the race. Papal encyclicals, and the hypocritical warnings of Protestant religious newspapers, can no more stop that movement than they can keep back the tides by Act of Parliament. The morning is breaking, the shadows are lifting, and heaven is speaking with accents loud

and clear to those who have ears to listen and a heart to understand. Some of you men who come here on Thursday mornings tell me that you are not so sure of the reality of the unseen world as Christians profess to be, and that you are not convinced that the voice of Jesus has ever spoken to needy suffering men since it was silenced on the cruel cross of Calvary. You may tell me that I have no proof of these things, even though, after a fashion, you may like to hear me talk about them. Well, I will go with you so far as to admit that it really does not matter so much as people think that a man should be sure of the life beyond death, or be able to give a name to the voice of hope and love within his own soul. What is often called faith in these matters is only a mixture of credulity and irreverence. The thing of first importance is that you should be true to the best of which you *can* be sure. But suffer me to declare my own conviction in these matters. I can no more doubt that life shall live for evermore than I can doubt that life is lived at all.

> And though in this lean age forlorn
> Too many a voice may cry,
> That man shall have no after-morn,
> Not yet of these am I.
>
> The man survives, and whatsoe'er
> He wrought of good or brave,
> Will mould him through the cycle year
> That dawns behind the grave.

There are times when I almost feel as though I can hear the voice of the multitude that no man can number, around the sea of glass mingled with fire.

I feel that the universe is spirit and nothing but spirit, and that infinity and eternity are implied in the very existence of every individual soul. That being so, the conviction grips and holds me that no voice that has ever spoken a word for God and humanity can have ceased to speak because of the change called death, which is only a change from the lesser to the larger, from the lower to the higher side of life. Moreover, it seems to me unthinkable that the Jesus who suffered and died to awaken men to the true meaning of life, and whose name has lived in human hearts ever since, should have passed out of human ken or be helpless to influence human destiny. If so, the world is indeed topsy-turvy, and God has been sporting with the most sacred feelings of His children. No, no; because life is glorious; because life at the heart of things is good; because life is the slow unfoldment of God in humanity, this Jesus of long ago is still active and potent in the regeneration of the world. The word which is destroying ecclesiasticism to-day is His word; the word which is kindling the new spirit of brotherhood in the nations is His word; the word of emancipation to the lowly and the sad is His word. Here and there some beloved disciple straining his eyes through the gloom towards that dim shore which shall be so bright by and by discerns His sacred form, and whispers to the rest, "It is the Lord." But not all the brave fishermen who are casting the net have the same clearness of vision. They obey, but they do not see. They know not that it is Jesus.

Do not mistake me. This is no longer the Jesus

of Galilee who was so foully done to death by religious materialists nineteen hundred years ago; He is the same, yet not the same. He was limited then; He is unlimited now. It cannot but be that that human Jesus has entered into the full consciousness of God and grasped the sceptre of omnipotence. That, and nothing less than that, is the destiny of all humanity too. And yet it helps me to think of God as though He wore the very face of Jesus. Think of all that is most sacred in what you have known of humanity, and see it upon the throne of God.

Yes, I believe it. Poor struggling humanity is neither being neglected nor led wrong. There is no room for pessimism, much less for despair. All the noble voices of the past are speaking still, and most of all the voice of Him who spake as never man spake. It is He who bids us cast, on the right side of the ship, that true gospel message of love and joy which shall gather all men into the unbroken fellowship of eternal truth at last.

Let us be sure as to what that message is. It is very simple, so simple that it repels many who seek "for some great thing to do or secret thing to know." It is the commandment to banish all hate by means of loving-kindness. It is the call to men to trust their own divinity and work out their own salvation, because it is God that worketh in them both to will and to do. So many people seem afraid of trusting this because they think it implies leaning upon the arm of flesh. It is the very opposite; it is the proclamation that we are the children of that eternal humanity which is God, and must

recognise our lineage in order to stand upon our feet and live. It is the exhortation to develop our individuality by labouring to destroy the hideous monster called Individualism. It is a message of cheer to the oppressed; it tells us to break one another's bonds and free all the prisoners of materialism. It forbids belief in the power of that which is basest in human nature, and calls forth faith in that which is noblest. It points the road to true happiness by showing men that self-seeking must inevitably end in failure and disappointment. It bids us believe in the dawning of a brighter day for the poor and weak who have hitherto been trampled underfoot by covetousness and pride of place. It is the summons to us all to find our joy in binding up the broken-hearted and wiping tears away.

Just imagine what would happen if you really believed this message, and acted upon it. It would be casting the net upon the right side of the ship, the side of the world's knowledge of its own need. Think how many people there are in this church at this moment whose hearts are filled with sorrow and corroding care. Think of those who have given up hope of anything better. Think of the thousands, the millions, beyond these walls to whom life is devoid of any meaning whatever, and who never dream of any higher state of existence in this world or the next. Ought this to go on? Is there any need for it to go on? The voice of Christ is giving it the lie. We cannot be too practical and definite in our evangel. The real Christianity, in this or any other day, is that which comes as a message of comfort and hope to burdened hearts

along the line of their real difficulties and troubles. It says to the small tradesman, It is a cruel thing that you should be crushed over the precipice of ruin; come and help us to get men to live together in a kinder, nobler way. It says to the rich man, You see how little riches can do to make you glad; come and help us to breathe into all troubled hearts the peace you want in yours. It says to the bereaved, Look up; your dead are not gone; they are more alive than you in the world of eternal reality. It says to all the weary, the discouraged, and the broken in heart, We are one in God; our home is beyond the smiling and the weeping, and we are going there together. We *must* go together, for none of us is complete without all the rest. Even Jesus would not be perfect without the full ingathering of a redeemed humanity to the Father's heart. Undivided and unbroken we must ascend with Him to our eternal home. That is what His voice is saying from that farther shore. Pray God that we who toil upon the deep may ever cast the net upon the right side, as we hear our Master's voice at the breaking of the day.

XI

SOWING AND REAPING

"*And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth.*"—JOHN iv. 37.

THIS saying derives its force from the communistic quality of all good actions, but it has a further range likewise. It tells us something of the working of the moral law relating both to retribution and redemption. There is no subject on which religious thought is more confused at present than this. The older view of the matter has hopelessly broken down, and we have not yet adjusted ourselves to the new focus required by the testimony of moral experience in the light of modern recognition of the solidarity of the human race. My object this morning is to try to show if I can, with this text to guide us, the relation between the certainty of individual retribution for wrong-doing, and the place for full forgiveness and redemption by vicarious suffering. It will be seen at once, therefore, that our theme is a large and important one, and will require the most careful statement.

To begin with, let us examine the situation immediately presumed in the words of our text. The scene is that of the evangelising of the Samaritans through the conversation of Jesus with the woman at the well. I have previously taken occasion to

point out that whether this story be historically true or not it is used here, in accordance with the method of the writer of this gospel, to illustrate something far larger. He uses an incident as a parable. Jesus may or may not have talked with a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, but the real point of the narrative has little or nothing to do with the Samaritans as such. I need not remind you that this gospel was written long after the fall of Jerusalem, and the permeation of the Græco-Roman world with the message of Christianity. It was thus impossible for the able man who wrote this gospel to ignore the new situation which had been created, namely, that Christianity had now become a universal religion. Some of you may be surprised to hear that this was not so from the first. You have been accustomed, perhaps, to take for granted, like most of our fellow-Christians, that the religion in which we have been brought up has always been much the same as it is now. You may think of it as having come into the world as a full-blown system of doctrine, so to speak, intended for all mankind, and preached as such by missionaries who went forth from Jerusalem to every part of the known world. If so, you are mistaken. The little group of Christians who first met in Jerusalem did not look upon their gospel in any such way. What they thought they had to do was to preach the Kingdom of God to their own countrymen; they did not look beyond the borders of their own nation. They worked for, and expected to see, an ideal human society, a regenerated Israel with its capital in Jerusalem, but they did not think of including

Gentiles within the scope of its benefits unless they became Jews. Before long, however, circumstances became too much for them. The new religious revival could not be contained within such narrow bounds; it broke through and began to spread everywhere as the glad tidings of a heaven on earth with Jesus as its king. Of course, the great instrument in bringing this about was the apostle Paul —and he had to fight hard with the nationalist party in order to carry the point—but, perhaps, the moral force behind the new movement would have done it in any case. Paul and those who sympathised with him carried the Christian gospel to the furthest confines of the world-wide Roman Empire in a few short years. This process was accelerated by the destruction of Jerusalem, and the consequent downfall of Jewish-nationalist hopes in A.D. 70. Henceforth it was clearly impossible to think of Judæa as the limit within which Christianity could be established, for the Jews were now a scattered race, and had not accepted Christianity in any great numbers. From this point, therefore, Christianity became far more a Gentile than a Jewish religion; in fact, it had become practically transplanted to Greek and Roman soil, and had lost its original connection with Judaism.

Now, please understand that this consummation is what the writer of the fourth gospel really had in mind when he wrote my text. This man was not a Jew at all, and he certainly could not have known much about Samaria. He did not begin to write until Christianity was already a considerable force in the Roman Empire and growing rapidly

stronger every day. All the illustrations he makes use of in his gospel are meant to bear upon this state of things. This Samaritan woman and her friends and neighbours stand for the religions and philosophies of the whole Gentile world. The Christian missionaries had now discovered in these a practically unlimited field of activity, and had set themselves the task of winning them all for Jesus. The ancient pagan civilisation was ripe and ready for the new word of hope and inspiration which the Christians had to offer; it was far more sympathetic to it than the Jews had been. People were tired of the futilities and insincerities of pagan worship. No one really believed in the old gods, and philosophy was a poor substitute for the zeal and enthusiasm of religious faith. The subjects of the mighty Roman empire found themselves standing between two worlds—one dead, the other powerless to be born. Thoughtful men were pessimistic. There was no whole-hearted zeal and enterprise anywhere, no cause which could arouse self-sacrificing devotion. Into this weary and dispirited civilisation Christianity leaped with a vigour and energy that commanded an instant hearing; it was then pretty much in intensity and belief in the future what Socialism is now, and it spread like a prairie fire. This is what is alluded to in my text, and the words are put into the mouth of Jesus Himself. In this passage the writer describes exactly what was going on under his eyes.

"Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields: for they

are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true: One soweth and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours."

What chiefly interests me about this remarkable paragraph is that it is a very vivid and accurate description by an intelligent and earnest man of a situation which was actually in progress at the moment when he wrote. If he were writing for the *Daily News* or the *Daily Chronicle* to-day, with the same state of things before him, he might do it in some such terms as the following: Fellow-Christians, you are rather too ready to speak vaguely of a future time when God shall establish His kingdom with power and give us the harvest which Christ has sown. But is there not a harvest which we can begin to reap now? Look at the teeming population of the vast cities of the world-wide empire to which we belong. All these people are sick and tired of the platitudes and conventionalities of the older faiths. They know there is nothing in them, and that they have no power to stir the human heart to higher things. They contain no evangel, no promise for the future, no demand upon the best and deepest in their adherents. The people are ready and willing to listen to the true note if you can sound it. Jesus has something to say to the world; let us say it with all our might and the world will hear. We shall see fruit of our

labours at once, for the fields are white unto harvest. Great souls of ages past have sown that we may reap. Socrates and Plato, not to speak of many other wise and great leaders of the people, have prepared the way for our Master. Let us take full advantage of it. It must be His will that we should reap for Him what others have sown. In fact, His harvest is their harvest too, and sowers and reapers shall all rejoice together.

I think this was a most inspiring utterance and quite in keeping with the best that the Alexandrian fathers of the Church were accustomed to say about the relation between the Christian gospel and the noblest Greek thought. Indeed it is unquestionable that the new religion absorbed and glorified that thought almost without knowing it; in a certain sense Christianity owes as much to Greek and Roman minds as it does to the prophets of ancient Israel; both streams met and became a mighty flood in the religion of Jesus. The best and most enlightened of the early Christian workers knew this, and considered themselves the inheritors of the pagan moralists as well as of the Jewish preachers. All belonged to Jesus, and was part of the sowing in preparation for His harvest.

This consideration brings me to the further point already suggested at the beginning of the sermon, namely, the solidarity of mankind in the sowing and reaping of good and evil. How far can we ever benefit or suffer alone? Can any human being be either rewarded or punished individually? Is there such a thing as reaping exactly what you have sown without relation to any one else? If so,

where does redemption come in, and what is it? What does forgiveness involve, and how does it take effect? To put the matter in a nutshell—how far is individual reward or retribution consistent with vicarious suffering as the means of salvation? There is no need to deal with these questions in detail. All that is required is that we should make sure of the general principle to which to refer them. In order to clear the ground for the examination of that principle let us remind ourselves of the way in which the subject is familiarly presented in Christian preaching. In stating it I wish you to believe that it is far from my intention to belittle it, for it enshrines a truth whose moral power has been demonstrated without ceasing in the history of the Christian Church. In popular parlance it might not unfairly be presented thus: We are all sinners, and to some extent, even in this world, we must suffer for our sins. But we need not reap exactly what we have sown. We have a representative and substitute with God, Jesus Christ the righteous One, who is the propitiation for our sins provided we accept Him as such. Faith in Jesus secures pardon and justification; the Redeemer takes upon Himself the responsibility for all that we have done amiss, and His merits are imputed to us. There is thus no necessity for reaping what we have sown, if we only avail ourselves of the plan of redemption. As the old evangelistic hymn has it—

> Nothing either great or small,
> Nothing, sinner, no;
> Jesus did it, did it all,
> Long, long ago.

Now to call this belief absolutely false is impossible and wrong. It is not false, but we ought to try and find out in what way it is true. To believe it without seeing why and in what sense it is reasonable is not a very lofty way of believing it. And yet it has thrilled innumerable hearts, awakened innumerable consciences, and brought men into holy relationship with God as no other doctrine has ever done. I doubt not that there are some people listening to me this morning to whom this way of putting the truth about human salvation is unspeakably precious, and if they want to call out and say so I should not object in the least; in fact, I should feel like joining with them. But you will admit that there are others here to whom such a statement means nothing, or, if it means anything, stands for something unjust and immoral. Such as these would tell you that it does not help them at all to be assured that Jesus bore their sins in His own body on the tree, and that in consequence they will be relieved from some penalty in the world to come for the evil they have wrought here. They cannot understand how God can rightly demand such a substitutionary sacrifice, or in what way it could effect its object if He did. What conceivable relation is there between a few hours of agony on a Roman gibbet nineteen hundred years ago, and all the punishment of all the wickedness of the human race for thousands of years before and thousands of years yet to come? You can see, therefore, without much difficulty that even on moral grounds strong objection can be taken, and is being taken, by robust and healthy minds to the doctrine that in

some mysterious way Christ has reaped beforehand the harvest of all the evil which you and I are sowing to-day, and that therefore we need not do so ourselves.

But there are still further objections to the accepted doctrine as popularly stated, and not the least of these is the fact that in the New Testament itself plain and emphatic assertions are made which are totally inconsistent with it. Take, for example, the well-known passage in Galatians vi. 7: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life." Here is certainly no justification for the belief that a death-bed repentance and faith in the merits of a Redeemer will compensate for a wicked life. But in the recorded words of Jesus Himself are warnings equally explicit, as, for example, Matthew v. 25, 26: "Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing." This paying of the uttermost farthing does not at all consist with the popular presentation of a full and free salvation secured by faith alone. Whatever else it may mean it certainly contradicts the idea that a wrong-doer can go scot-free by the simple expedient of rolling the burden upon somebody else. How remarkable,

too, is the suggestion that the payment of the uttermost farthing is possible! According to what we have been usually taught, the sinner cannot pay and cannot come out of his prison house. The retributive justice of God, so we are told, does not provide for the release of any culprit by any payment of his own. And yet here stand the words of Jesus as an explicit declaration to the contrary. It must be admitted, too, that the theory that a bad man can get off, or ought to get off, the consequences of his guilty acts by making a sort of deal with providence, who has been kind enough to provide a scape-goat, is repugnant to the better feelings of all right-minded men. That eminent theologian, Mark Twain, has some scathing things to say about it in his book, *More Tramps Abroad*. I make no apology for introducing that master of the human heart into a sermon; his moral instincts are those of the ordinary manly, high-minded citizen of to-day. Describing a barbarous murder by highwaymen, he concludes by giving the text of the confession of one of them after receiving sentence of death in a court of law. The confession ended with a pious profession of confidence in the murderer's eternal salvation through the blood of Christ. His victims had not had time to get converted and make sure of heaven in the same way. Mark points out this fact, and sarcastically comments upon it as follows: "His redemption was a very real thing to him, and he was as jubilantly happy on the gallows as ever was Christian martyr at the stake. We dwellers in this world are strangely made, and mysteriously circumstanced.

We have to suppose that the murdered men are lost, and that the murderer is saved; but we cannot suppress our natural regrets!"

One thing more before I leave this part of my subject. Look out into the world and you will see some men reaping what they have sown without waiting for a future heaven or hell, and no amount of faith in Christ has saved them from it. Repentance does not give the drunkard back his wrecked constitution; it does not restore the corrupt body of the sensualist as the flesh of a little child; it does not screen any man from the slow and deadly working of the effects of the life he has lived in the service of gain—he has become like his pursuits, and cannot be otherwise. "Be sure your sin will find you out." How often the guilty secret comes to light and blasts a promising career! How relentless seems the judgment that occasionally overtakes the man who has wilfully followed a wrong course! How often a lovable character conjoined to high ability has been utterly wasted so far as this world is concerned by some one foolish step taken in an hour of sinful delirium? It is not impossible that there are some listening to me at this moment whose chance in life was forfeited long ago by some act of wicked folly performed under the stress of temptation—some woman, perhaps, or some trifling with a trust committed to your charge. Do you want to tell me that the lifelong retribution which follows upon such departures from rectitude is not an awful reality? It avails nothing to say that it appears to fall spasmodically, and that some of the worst of men go unpunished all their days. If it

falls at all it surely knocks the bottom out of all easy conventional theories about laying our sins on Jesus or anybody else.

Here, then, we come sharp up against a formidable problem. We have seen that belief in the redeeming work of Jesus has been the dynamic of most of the noblest and richest spiritual experience of past and present; we see too that the way it is usually preached is repellent to the moral instincts of the ordinary man of to-day, and does not square with his knowledge of life or his sense of justice. Moreover, on the authority of Jesus Himself we are warned that we shall inevitably reap what we sow. How are we to reconcile all this? One's heart sinks at the thought that no saviour can help us, and that individually we shall have to endure here or hereafter, the full and unescapable penalty of all the evil we have wrought. There is not much gospel in such an assurance; it may fill us with fear, but it does not kindle hope and love. Is that the whole truth? Is there nothing better?

Well, I am sure there is, and I will try to state it to you as clearly as I see it myself. It is this: There is no such thing as individual retribution or individual salvation. For good or for evil the human race is a solidarity; we are all members one of another; we suffer and achieve in common. There is no heaven that does not imply willingness to share the sinner's hell; there is no hell that is not heaven in the making. God has no interest in punishment as such, and no evil-doer can bear his punishment alone. Indeed, there is no such thing as punishment in the sense that so much pain must

be endured for so much sin. There is nothing in which popular thinking goes more widely wrong than this. We frequently jump to the conclusion that when a man does an evil deed he ought to be visited with an appropriate penalty after the clumsy fashion of human justice, but that is not God's way at all. Retribution is meaningless except as a method of awakening the soul to its true condition; as soon as that is done the purpose of retribution is fully served. Is there not a great relief in the thought that in judgment our heavenly Father remembers mercy? Just make sure of that one principle, and you are on the track of the real significance of the redeeming work of Jesus. Let me show you what I mean. God's whole purpose with mankind may be summed up in saying that He seeks to realise a universal fellowship of love. Nothing short of this can satisfy Him or ourselves. Jesus saw this plainly when He went about Galilee long ago preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God. But how is that fellowship to be achieved? How can it be achieved otherwise than by the willingness of those who see it to labour and suffer for those who do not? Even with a partial and limited vision of the results to be gained this is what a good man would always wish to do. It is no true goodness that would settle down to enjoy heaven while any kind of hell remained. See then how the matter presented itself to Jesus. He saw, as we see to-day, that most of the suffering of the world was caused by human selfishness and blindness. He saw that, instead of getting together and helping one another with all their might, men were trying

to rob and injure one another, with the result that history was one long series of crimes and miseries, with here and there a gleam of moral splendour derived from the discovery that individual life has no meaning apart from the whole. Jesus saw that earth was hell already because of these things, and that it would never become heaven until men had learned to find their true interest and their true joy in the service of all, which is the service of God. It was as though He said to Himself: There is no human being whose burden I would not take if I could, and so long as selfishness is producing hell I will stay in that hell and labour to turn it into heaven; I will act as though every evil consequence of human waywardness were my due; I shall willingly bear anything and everything that will make the burden of humanity a little less heavy and enable men to see with clear eyes where true blessedness is to be found. Anyhow, this was what Jesus did, and in doing it He showed the world what true humanity really is. There is only one word that would adequately describe that true humanity wherever you find it, and it is Christ. The Christ spirit in man is that which does what Jesus did, accepts anything and everything in the service of love. The man who is possessed by that spirit does not pause to inquire who deserves what; he just goes on working as though all the disabilities of the race were his very own. In a selfish world this necessarily involves a Calvary some time or other, but the Christ-man cannot shrink from it, and cannot draw any line of distinction between his own lot and that of other people. His part is

to act as though the whole burden of the whole race were his own, and as though all the consequences of human wickedness were justly visited upon his head. This is no light matter, but to stop short of it is to miss the highest of which human nature is capable.

Now, see what follows from this. It is a glorious fact that a man is saved in the true sense as soon as he becomes possessed by that spirit, and he can hardly be said to be saved until he does. And it is that spirit which is saving the world, just as the contrary spirit is the cause of the darkness and pain of the world. All men are capable of showing the Christ spirit at times, but it is only as they begin to see and to enter into the full meaning of the Christ life that they can properly be said to be saviours. Jesus has made more saviours than all the masters of mankind put together, but even He knew that He stood in a grand historic succession. There were those before Him who, though with a more limited vision, had accepted the cross in the service of their fellow-men, and had freely given their lives thereon in willing sacrifice for their generation. Were not the Isaiahs and Jeremiahs of history sin-bearers? Five centuries and a half before Jesus was born this truth was clearly seen by the man who wrote in words that the world will never let die: "Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed." The cumulative effect of the witness and suffering of all the seers and servants of the race, from the dawn of history until to-day, is the true

work of Christ, and the true salvation of the world. There is no other salvation, and no possibility of any other than the operation of the spirit that turns sinners into saviours by rendering them willing to bear all the evil results of human selfishness in order to hasten the advent of the kingdom of God.

There is thus a solidarity of good as well as a solidarity of evil, and I want you to see that there can be no question of separating the one from the other. I desire to put the matter as vividly as ever I can in order that you may appreciate its force and realise what it is that has caused men to love the story of the cross of Christ. It is indeed absolutely true that the Saviour can be substituted for the sinner so far as the consequences of wrong-doing are concerned, and you can see the process going on around you every day. The one thing in which no saviour can ever impute his merits to the sinner is in the character of the individual wrong-doer. That is the sinner's very own, and he cannot jump away from it. In that respect what he has sown he must reap all by himself; he cannot grow a new soul in five minutes. A man's thoughts and aspirations make him what he is, and there is no kind of justification before God which can free a coarse and sensual nature from the necessity of pulling down and rebuilding. It is not what the soul suffers that matters; it is what the soul is. Slowly and toilsomely the selfish man must break through the habits and prejudices in which he has imprisoned his own divinity; step by step he must ascend the hill of the Lord. All that love can ever do is to help him along the way; it cannot absolve him

from the necessity for making the pilgrimage; it cannot bear him at a bound from lowest hell to highest heaven. But when it becomes a question of sharing the suffering the sinner has caused, or even bearing it for him, saviourhood can never hesitate. It must just enter into it and endure it until the last barrier has been passed and no more sorrow remains. There is no question of mine and thine in the matter; true Christhood will seek to bear all without making any terms or claiming any exemption; in fact, the nearer any soul approaches to the moral stature of Jesus the more eager and willing it will become to endure the worst in the service of the best. And here, perhaps, is the truest road of emancipation for any human being who is struggling out of selfishness into the eternal light and love. No man can ever bear the entire consequences of his own wrong-doing, but he can bear other people's, and the nobler he grows the more he will want to do it. This is the very soul of the Christian evangel and the secret of its power. What Jesus did all men will have to become willing to do before the victory of good over evil can be finally won. Jesus suffered nothing on Calvary which every good man has not also to suffer in his degree. We are individually and collectively the beneficiaries of every self-sacrificing life which has ever been lived, and every noble death which has ever been died, in every age of the world. The crucifixion of Christ is as long as human history, and millions of the sons of God have shed their blood therein. It is going on now, and will go on until divine love has completely triumphed over

human sin. Yes, and that will be a day of exultation. For there is a further and deeper sense in which he that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together, and that is that sinner and saviour —the one who sowed the pain and the one who bore it—shall leap to one another in the glad fellowship of eternal love.

Do we not all know it? Is it not true that we are bearing the consequences of one another's misdeeds whether we will or no? Are there not people in this church at this moment who are sufferers because of other people's wrong-doing? And are not some of you conscious that your wrong-doing has caused many a pang in the hearts of those who love you? There are those here who have been beggared by other people's profligacy; here, too, are the victims of other people's lust and covetousness. "Herein is the saying true, one soweth and another reapeth." You know it to be true; you cannot help knowing it. Well, now, let me tell you how to face it. You can either face it like Jesus, or like the thief who cursed Him as he hung dying beside him; there is no middle way. One consequence of the sin of the world was that very crucifixion on Calvary. Jesus just accepted it, knowing well that He did not deserve it, but willing to suffer as though He did. Is it not the same to-day wherever nobleness of heart and the love that passeth knowledge are willing to reap the harvest of pain that others have sown? It is that willingness to suffer that makes all the difference between heaven and hell. The acceptance of injustice, poverty, misfortune, ruin, the very extremity of

evil, rather than become a cynic, desert a post, or cease to be a believer in what is right and good, is to put forth the saving power of God. Even if you are a poor faulty soul yourself you belong to Christ the moment you are willing to do that. Make it the keynote of your life, and it will fill it with glory. Throw all your individual interest into the scale of good in its conflict with evil, and you shall know what it is to be saved yourself. For it is the living Christ that does all this in you, as He has done it in millions before you into whose labours and sorrows you have entered now. Be as faithful as you can in your brief hour of service to what the world has seen in Jesus, and by and by you shall enter into the eternal fellowship of those whose greatest gladness it is to have been counted worthy to suffer with Him, that He and they might be glorified together.

A picket frozen on duty,
  A mother starved for her brood,
Socrates drinking the hemlock,
  And Jesus on the rood.

And the millions who, humble and nameless,
  The straight, hard pathway trod;
Some of us call it duty,
  And others call it God.

XII

CHRIST DYING FOR SINNERS

"*For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*"—ROM. v. 7–8.

THIS great evangelical saying is perfectly clear and intelligible just at it stands, but to realise its true bearing we ought not to consider it apart from its context. There is a vast background of religious ideas here which have to be taken into account in order to appreciate the force of one such utterance as this text of ours. It is hardly possible for us in the time at our disposal this morning to touch upon more than a few of those ideas, but we must not ignore them altogether on the mistaken assumption that our text can be sliced away from them, so to speak, and become its own explanation. This whole epistle is a carefully woven piece of reasoning, starting from certain premises and leading to fixed conclusions. If you want theology you have certainly got it here, for it is doctrinal from beginning to end. How remote it seems from everyday life! I do not believe there are three men in this congregation who ever take the trouble to read this epistle through. You like particular sayings in it,

maybe, but you never sit down to follow up and lay hold of the argument as a whole. Mind, I am not blaming you for the omission; I only point out the fact. But this fact has one bad result, namely, that people go on quoting the apostle Paul without realising that there are very few Pauline sentences which can be properly understood without a careful examination of the fabric of thought in which they appear. Most interpreters of his meaning do even worse; they come to these writings with their own fabric of thought ready made, and make use of isolated Pauline utterances to confirm it.

There is no saying in the whole of the New Testament to which this observation can be more fairly applied than the one which forms our text this morning. Very few people are able to read it without prejudice or with a clear understanding of the apostle's whole subject. In the background of our minds there is a system of so-called Christian belief in which we have been trained from our youth up, and which we think we find here. Let me remind you of it before I go any farther. You must forgive me for stating it crudely; I want to state it crudely in order that you may think of it in its unlovely nakedness. Here it is: We are all sinners. We became sinners before we were born. We could not help it, but it is no good saying so; we are as guilty as if we could help it. We were born in sin, but are as much to blame as though we had been born innocent. Adam did the mischief ages ago, and we have inherited the consequences. God was angry with Adam for bringing sin into the world, and has been angry with the whole race

ever since, although He has allowed it to go on sinning and suffering for generations without number. He is angry because He is a God of justice. His justice takes the form of leaving individual souls to suffer and struggle here for a while, and then at the moment of death plunging them into a hell of everlasting torment. But this incomprehensible Being is also a God of love. How the two are to be reconciled is a mystery. One might fairly question how the Creator who let His creation go wrong so early in its history, and prepared an endless hell for the victims of His failure, could be at the same time a God of love—but there it is, that is what we have been told about Him. Because He was a God of love He waited a few thousand years, and then sent His beloved Son to make a restoration possible. This beloved Son is a different kind of son from ourselves—in fact we are not sons at all, we are only creatures; we shall come to be regarded as sons only if we accept the benefits of the redemption which the real Son has come to achieve. Who He is, and how He does the work, are equally incomprehensible. The theologians have been trying to explain for nineteen hundred years, and are as busy as ever. But the general outline appears to be as follows. The Son of God is born as a little baby in an entirely miraculous way which is supposed to be holier than all other births; grows up to manhood; teaches people for a few months, and then submits to being put to death upon a cross. Only a few people hear about Him while He is alive, and the great majority of them regard Him as an ordinary man; some call Him good, some

call Him bad, and the latter are powerful enough to have him condemned as a criminal. They never dream that that condemnation has anything to do with the salvation of the world. But it has; it turns out afterwards that this was the very thing He came for. He did not come to teach people or even to live an ideal life—at any rate, these were quite subordinate to His main purpose; He came to die a death. Those who put Him to death were quite unaware of this, but their ignorance did not matter in the least. God accepted this death as a full and sufficient substitute for all that sinful mankind would otherwise have had to suffer. Why He should do so, or why it should be just or reasonable to do so, is not stated. This death, mind you, is the equivalent of all that the millions of sinners who have been born into this world since Adam fell would have to endure to all eternity in hell. Why it should be so nobody can understand, we are bidden to accept it on faith. But the amnesty is not quite complete, for all that; there is a condition attached to it. We have to "believe." This believing means that we are to claim the benefits of this deliverance before we die, it would be no use claiming it afterwards. As it is probable that only a small minority of the human race have ever availed themselves of this condition, we can only infer that, so far as the majority are concerned, the destiny of the race is just what it would have been if the Redeemer had never come, that is, they have all gone, or are going, to hell. Time was, and not so long ago, when preachers and theologians said so with the greatest clearness;

they do not seem to know what to say about it now.

While I have been giving this rude outline of popular belief concerning what is presumed in my text, I have no doubt that some of you have been saying mentally that few would put the case so baldly now-a-days. You are quite right, and that is precisely why I have stated it. It is still presumed in Christian thought, and especially in Christian preaching, by men who have really ceased to believe it, if they ever did believe it. They want to believe and disbelieve it at the same time. They will tell you that no one nowadays, of ordinary intelligence, believes in the fall of Adam as an actual historical event; nevertheless they believe in a similar catastrophe of some kind, though nobody knows where, when, or how it came about. They concede that man's physical beginnings were as lowly as those of the brutes, but assert that at some one point in history brute ignorance made way for sin, and God's plans were frustrated to such an extent that redemption became a necessity. They go on to admit, tacitly if not overtly, that an eternal hell is unthinkable, but they do not seem to see that as soon as they have said this the whole fabric of the doctrine of redemption collapses, for its foundation motive is gone. Then, when it comes to a question of the mode in which that redemption was effected, they take refuge in statements about the mystery of the cross, without ever attempting to give a clear idea of what they mean. It is this kind of hazy and inconsistent presentation of Christian truth which is the curse upon modern Christian

activity, and we ought never to rest until we have put an end to it. Men feel, and rightly feel, that there is a great truth underneath the Christian doctrine of the cross of Christ, and they do not want to let it go. But while all this agglomeration of rubbish, and worse than rubbish, gathers about it, we shall never see the true glory of the simple evangel of Jesus as He saw it Himself. Last year I was present in a great religious assembly which (chiefly as a protest against my presence, I think) rose and sang, "When I survey the wondrous cross." I sang it myself as hard as any of them, and would sing it to-day. But there must be no half measures with the lie that is strangling the glorious spiritual truth celebrated in those words and enshrined in the heart of my text.

Now turn to the thought of the writer of the epistle to the Romans, and let us see whether it squares with the conventional belief we have been examining. Here is a surprising and, to me, inexplicable thing. There are abundance of scholars in our seats of learning and in our Christian pulpits to-day who are quite well aware that no man believes, and no sensible man dare preach, the doctrine of redemption as held by the apostle Paul—supposing Paul to be the author of this epistle. I suppose some of you think that the ideas I have just been outlining are in substance the same as those set forth in this part of the New Testament; if so, you are mightily mistaken. Paul would have repudiated every one of you as heretics. To him the fall was real enough, and he knew nothing about Darwin's *Descent of Man*. But there was this

difference between Paul and your preceptors; he believed that the principal penalty of sin was not hell, but death—physical death. Is not that an enormous difference to start with? Here it is; read this epistle for yourself, but take off your coloured glasses while you do it. Like you, he believed that the death of the Son of God was the means of human redemption, and that sinners have individually to believe in it in order to be saved; but see what he meant by salvation. He was not thinking of deliverance from a future hell; he was thinking of deliverance from *death;* he wanted things to be made so that human beings would not need to die any more. He was not even thinking of going to heaven. What he wanted was that heaven should come here, and that all believers in Christ should be made immortal by having their physical bodies transformed into something better. Here are the words in the eighth chapter of this epistle, and they mean exactly what they say: "If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by His Spirit that dwelleth in you." Could anything be plainer? But honestly, is there a single man among you who believes that? Of course you do not. It belongs to a mode of thinking which is as remote from the mind of the present age as the siege of Troy. You do *not* believe that death came into this world in any such way, or that salvation consists primarily in being enabled to live on here for ever and ever. And yet this is the notion presumed in my text. We can see now quite plainly what Paul means by

the significance of the death of Christ from his point of view. When Christ died, He died, according to Paul, because death was the penalty of sin. There was no question of His dying to save you and me from hell; neither was there any question as to how much He suffered or the manner of the death He died. Paul's idea was that if He died at all He submitted to the death penalty which we, and not He, had justly incurred. But in doing this He broke the power of death, so that henceforth those who were joined to Him by faith need not die as the rest of the world would have to die. This is all, and it does not require much perspicacity to see that there is not a single Church in Christendom which holds that doctrine to-day.

But, having said all this, I desire to point out that there was something present to Paul's mind which is also present to yours and mine, and which has given to doctrines about the death of Christ all the vitality they have ever possessed. You will soon see what that something was if you look at the structure of this passage, and then compare it with what you know of human life. Paul says that it was a great thing for Christ to be willing to die for sinners, and he appeals to his readers to say out of their own experience whether this was not so. He says that people are not often willing to die even for the sake of a righteous man, although sometimes a few might dare to do so for a good man or a good cause. We need not suppose that any important distinction is here intended to be drawn between the righteous and the good; all the writer means is that the majority of people will not die

for anybody, but that occasionally some heroic being does give his life for something great and good. The word "man" is purposely left out in this second clause in order to give the word "good" a greater scope. Very likely Paul has in mind the devotion of a soldier who dies for his general or his country. The point of the illustration is that Christ was found willing to die for people who were not at all worthy of the sacrifice; He did not die for the good, but for the bad. Paul leaps right at the heart of the matter when he says that this magnificent self-devotion on the part of Jesus was a manifestation of the love of God. I am glad he said that. It is his perception of that all-dominating truth that redeems his theologising from mere superstition, and has given it life and power. This is where our experience joins on to his, and helps us to see how, underneath even the most divers forms of statement, men have always been able to see that which was really great and good in the relations of God and man. He has touched the very point. The only thing we know about the love of God, the only proof we have that there is a God of love at all, is the willingness of man to die for man; and when we begin to talk about that we see that the death of Christ is the expression of the grandest kind of self-oblation that has ever been made in the uplifting of mankind to God.

Let me be perfectly plain with you. I do not value in the least the intellectual framework in which Paul inserts this great idea. His notions about the fall, the connection between sin and

death, the wrath of God, and all such-like were due to his training. They have done untold mischief in Christianity, and it is time we got rid of them. Paul was great, not because of these notions, but in spite of them; he was great because he saw right to the heart of the meaning of the love of God, but we can see that too, without subjecting ourselves to Paul's theology or any one else's. It is not a matter of theology, but of everyday experience. You can see this truth at work any day you like, and you need not go far to look for it. I wonder what Jesus Himself would have thought if He had been told of the word-spinning that would be indulged in, in order to provide a proper theory of the way in which He came to die, and what that death would effect for the world. You may be quite certain that He would have been astonished and even, perhaps, indignant. He knew well enough why it was that He had to die, and so did His adversaries. He had to die because He stood for a certain ideal in human relations, and in the relations of man and God, which His countrymen refused to accept. There was nothing new in that ideal; it had been preached before, but never so uncompromisingly and vividly as by Jesus. It was an old truth so plainly stated, and so bravely lived, that it cut at the root of all the shams and hypocrisies of the time. It was simply this: Love God and your neighbour; or rather, love God *in* your neighbour. That ancient maxim was the sum and substance of all that Jesus had to say; the rest was simply a commentary upon it. He preached love, and then set to work to show them what love was. His Jewish

contemporaries were looking for the Kingdom of God on earth. So was He, but He told them plainly that the Kingdom of God was not what they thought. He came very near what they thought, so far as the externals of the Kingdom were concerned; where Jesus differed from his critics was that He maintained that no kingdom was worth having which did not imply in every man simplicity and humility of heart, and a willingness to find one's true joy in the service of the whole. He wanted individual men to stop thinking of themselves apart from human society or from God, and to see instead that they had no life worth calling their own until it was given freely and fully in the service of the common good. Even to-day that teaching is ahead of human perceptions, although we are beginning to see that it is true, and that nothing less than that will ever break our chains and set us free from all the ills of life. Jesus managed to live it Himself. From first to last His career moved along that line, and when it closed in death it was only because those who killed Him could not understand its greatness. They would not kill Him to-day, perhaps; but do not imagine that they would understand Him much better than the Jews and Romans of nineteen hundred years ago. Few would believe, to begin with, that He was really sincere. If He undertook a public ministry, as He did then, we should begin to question His motives; we should pick holes in His character; should laugh at Him, call Him a visionary, a rogue, or a fool. If the force of His personality made it impossible to ignore Him we should begin to get

angry. If He pointed out with unerring finger the unrealities and inconsistencies of our ideals and practices, as He did with the Pharisees, we should plot and scheme to get rid of Him or discredit Him in the eyes of the public. Try to imagine a perfectly unselfish, high-souled man, with a clear vision of the wrongs and sufferings of the time, and the will to right them, and you have Jesus. Thank God we have had a fair number of people who have caught the spirit of Jesus, but never one, so far as we know, who was so utterly lost and absorbed in the good of mankind that he might be said to have no life but the whole. Yet such was Jesus, if we are to believe what tradition says of Him. A life like that, conjoined to the driving force of a transcendent personality, was sure to produce an explosion. It would do so even now. For, remember, if the ideal of Jesus were carried out there would no longer be any question of ranks and grades in society. "He that would be first among you let him be last of all and servant of all." What a revolution! What would become of money-making? All getting for yourself would be utterly impossible; no one would want to do such a thing. What about Governments? Governments in our sense of the word would disappear for ever, for men would not need to be governed. We should have solved the great antinomy between communal restraints and individual freedom; we should all be socialists, and all anarchists too, and yet we should call ourselves by neither name. No, it is not at all wonderful that Jesus had to die. His career to-day would be a living death if He preached that

doctrine with the same moral intensity behind it, for it would go straight in the teeth of every vested interest on the face of the earth.

But, just because He lived that life and taught that truth in ages long ago, this world is a sweeter place to live in now, and, "the best is yet to be." Life may be sad and dark to most of us, but we have seen the shining of a great light, and things can never be again as though that light had never shone. There never has been any moral dynamic comparable to the death of Jesus, measured by its awakening effects in the consciences and hearts of men. But why should we separate it from all self-sacrifice that has ever taken place before or since? That brave love which showed itself so grandly in Jesus was God in humanity, and we have seen the same God a thousand times in lives and deeds morally akin to Jesus. Paul saw that plainly, and so did some of the other New Testament writers. If we want a name for the God in man we cannot do better than use the word Christ. It is a larger word than Jesus, although it includes the latter. I cannot think of Jesus as other than Christ, but neither can I think of Him as any longer limited by the outlook of the carpenter of Nazareth. I think of Jesus now, as Paul thought of Him, enthroned above the limitations of time and sense; I see Him one with God in knowledge and power. But when I ask how He got there I turn my gaze back again to struggling, suffering men and women, and I see love giving itself in them as He gave Himself long ago in the days of His flesh. Perhaps there is no one amongst us in whom God shines forth as plainly as He shone in

the earthly Jesus, but He shines for all that, and wherever He shines I see a Christ. If you want to see Christ, the God revealed in man, go to your own homes; He is there. Look into the face of that good woman who loves you dearly without asking herself why. Call to mind the things you have known her to do for you and others in which she never counted the cost or spared herself. Think of her patient fidelity in times of trouble or misfortune. Did she ever think of deserting you or leaving you to face the worst alone? Is not this a beautiful thing, a holy thing, that dwells beside you every day? You are accustomed to take it for granted, perhaps, without thinking of all that it means. In that same wife and mother there may be some other things you do not like to see; a little peevishness, possibly; now and then a measure of unreasonableness, or failure to understand what seems so plain to you; there are hours, no doubt, when you feel as though there were a grievous lack somewhere. Just so; this is not Jesus, you see; there is nobody in the wide world who sees the highest and deepest all the time, and never fails in living it. Jesus was Christ *all* the time, so we are told. But is there any one who is not Christ *some* of the time? If there were such a person he would be something less than human. Show me a being, however limited in outlook and defective in character, in whom love has ever meant the willing acceptance of a cross, and I will show you something of Christ, and therefore something of the love of God. There may be but little of it, but it is there. It is the one central hope for poor humanity. In all our filthiness, meanness,

brutality, crooked ways, hatred, scheming, distrust of one another, and all that exhibits the mark of the beast in human nature, we need never despair so long as we can discern that divine mystery, the love of God on the cross of human ministry to human need in the midst of anguish and pain. We may say, and say truly, that the tragedy of Calvary has been as long as history; it has never ceased; the scourgings, the mockings, and the crown of thorns are ever being inflicted upon the dying Christ, and from that agony humanity rises into newness of life. Do not speak of disbelieving it; it is not in your power to disbelieve it; this is no dogma, it is a process which is going on every day and hour before your very eyes.

And yet even this is not all. The truth in my text penetrates to a deeper stratum still. We all know a little of the thrill of giving ourselves in the service of some great ideal which has power to call forth the best in us. I do not think it is so rare as Paul thought to find people willing to die at the call of duty. The Queen of Portugal would have died the other day to save her son, and millions of humble mothers would do the same. There is never any lack of volunteers for a forlorn hope. Of all the hundreds of men here this morning there are few, if any, who would not be willing to give their lives for some one or something outside the circle of their own immediate self-interest. This is not a question for elaborate discussion, nor can it be elucidated in cold blood; it is in moments of great emotion that men find themselves capable of facing death when something has to be achieved that they

hold dearer than life. Yes, there are some things for which true men would dare to die. They have died for liberty, for truth and honour, for a noble leader or a sainted name. They have died for Jesus Himself, and no lives have ever been more cheerfully given than those which purchased the early victories of the cross. But Paul is quite right, nevertheless. These things are comparatively easy when placed alongside of the call to die for that which seems beyond the saving, and undeserving of the sacrifice. When Jesus died on Calvary, the wretches for whom His life was given were spitting in His face. They did not see what that life had meant, and He from whom they tore it must have felt as though it were a failure. It would not have been wonderful if Jesus had died cursing His murderers, but to die believing that they were worth the saving—that was divine. If there had been only one man in the mob who felt the power of that great self-offering it would have made Christianity possible. Such a death could not be died in vain without dethroning God. It was bound to do what it has proved itself able to do; it has called forth a response in human nature which is showing itself stronger as ages pass. Not a single word that you or I have ever said or sung about the death of Jesus exaggerates in the least the moral significance of that great event, even though neither He nor His murderers knew what it would do for mankind. Jesus never thought of dying to screen His foes from punishment. He was not thinking of their punishment at all. The one great purpose in His mind and heart was that of leading men to see what

life might be if lived in the fellowship of the love of God. The price He had to pay was terrible, but the result was worth it. It was His death that taught the lesson; if He had chosen any other way than the way that finally led Him to Calvary, if He had sought to be a Cæsar or a Napoleon, the world would still be sighing for a Saviour.

This is the greatest truth of all, the truth which men have dimly felt to be most precious in the gospel of Jesus. To die for sinners! How few can do it! We all draw the line somewhere. There comes a point beyond which you will not lay the life down. You can die for husband, brother, friend. Perhaps you can even die for the prodigal if he does not tax your patience too often. But who will die—that is who will suffer the last extremity, whatever it may be—for the ungrateful and the unrepentant? Many a mother has died for her boy—died to all that life holds dear—and seen no result of the agony. Like Jesus, her Calvary has ended in a broken heart. But then, he was *her* boy, bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh. How many people are there in all the world who could live as Jesus lived, and die as Jesus died, for humanity as such, humanity foul, degraded, and brutal; humanity scornful in its triumphant evil? That is a test of divine love which has not yet been equalled. Moreover, it takes heaven into the nethermost pit of hell. It tells me something of which I never wish to lose sight again. It tells me that I can never rise to highest heaven while there is a single burden in the universe that I am unwilling to share. It tells me that no sinner can suffer alone, and that

no saviour can stand aloof from what the sinner endures. The highest reach of saviourhood is that which regards the sinner's sentence as its very own and seeks to take the sinner's place. Is there such saviourhood? Yes, there is, and until you know it you do not know that which is deepest both in man and God.

A member of this Thursday congregation recently sent me a simple little story of a poor, ignorant woman in whom this truth shone grandly forth. I believe the account was supposed to be authentic; but, whether or no, it can be paralleled a thousand times in God's world to-day. This poor creature had been ill-used by her husband, a worthless wretch. She had had to work hard for a precarious livelihood because he refused to work at all. Life was so hard and dark for her that she might have been excused for hating and scorning the man who had made it so. This was Calvary over again, you see; and this child of God was being crucified. The day came when the husband was sentenced to penal servitude for a crime against society. One day the person who tells the story met this woman helping a broken-down man along the street towards her home. It was the released convict, and he looked the brute he was. Her explanation of her action was, "You see, sir, Jim has no one but me now!" Exactly. This man was reaping what he had sown, and she was voluntarily enduring it along with him. His sin had made her poor, and she accepted the poverty; it had narrowed and darkened her life, and she was willing to have it so rather than desert him. She was his one hope. She was bearing some of

the worst of the consequences of his wrong-doing for him. If ever that man could be brought back to truth and right it would be her suffering love that would do it. It was all unfair, so gloriously unfair! Can you not see what it was? This was Christ bearing the burden of sin. This is the way in which He is dying for sinners to-day. He is being slain on the altar of human hearts, and there is no other way in which the world is being saved or can be saved.

When I survey the wondrous Cross
  On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
  And pour contempt on all my pride.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
  That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
  Demands my life, my soul, my all!

XIII

THE TWO NATURES

"For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."—ROM. vii. 22–23.

WHETHER the experience declared in these words and their immediate context be that of the great apostle whose name it bears is of comparatively small importance; the impressive thing about it is its intense personal character. It has frequently been pointed out that the epistle to the Romans is more theological and less human than the other writings ascribed to St. Paul. This is quite true, but the criticism certainly does not apply to the passage which forms our text; that is human enough. Here is a living man telling us of his own inner life with its unceasing struggle between good and evil. In using this language he speaks for every one of us, for probably there is not a single soul among us who does not know at first hand something of the experience which is here so feelingly described. It is but seldom that men talk of these things, but their reticence does not mean that they think lightly of them. The best of men

must feel at times as though there were two natures within them struggling for the mastery against each other, and they never can be quite sure that the higher will prove itself permanently stronger than the lower. This presence of the two natures within every soul is one of the perplexing mysteries of our mundane existence. Theology or no theology, religion or no religion, the fact has to be faced. We cannot pretend to ignore it. The angel and the devil, the God and the beast, are ever pitted against each other within the human breast. I will make bold to say that there is not a single man before me at this moment, Christian or agnostic, Mohammedan or Jew, who does not know what I mean. We all know it; we have to know it; and there are times when the knowledge is positive pain. Permit me to examine the problem at close quarters for a few moments before passing on to suggest what I believe to be the most helpful way of meeting it. A full and complete solution of it we shall never find on this side of the grave; but we are not without light upon it, and to a large extent the solution lies in our own hands.

Note, then, to begin with, the intense realism of the way in which this man describes the antagonism between his higher and his lower self. No matter how earnestly he may desire to do the high and noble thing, he finds himself hampered and hindered by something within himself which drags him down and makes him the victim of that which he despises and abhors. This latter tendency he calls the "law of sin" or "the flesh." He seems to be thinking more particularly of the propensities

towards sensual indulgence, but the experience holds good of forms of evil which are not the direct result of animal cravings. The presence of these propensities is a humiliation to a high-minded man, but he cannot deceive himself as to what they are. He feels that, much as he would like to do the best and highest, he is always conscious of the presence and power of that which is base and foul. He cannot blame the outside world, and does not try to do so; the evil is innate, however it came there. It is himself and yet not himself. He earnestly longs to get free from it, and has succeeded in convincing himself that it is somehow bound up with life in the body. He regards the pure spirit, the divine essence, in every man as being weighted and tarnished by being imprisoned in the flesh. Hence his cry, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?" In this kind of language we have undoubtedly a suggestion of the doctrine, so extensively preached at the time my text was written, that the flesh is the seat of all evil, and that to free the soul from sin all that has to be done is to free it from the body. I do not mean that the writer really believes this without qualification, but it is plain enough that he is influenced by it. Nor is it wonderful that it should be so. When one considers the amount of wickedness which seems to spring from the desires of the flesh overpowering the will, it is quite a natural thing to believe that moral evil has its seat in the body rather than the soul. I cannot stay to labour this point; I can only remark that its importance in contemporary thought has influenced to some

extent the language of our text. Evidently the writer believes with all his heart that what is wanted, in order to bring his whole being into harmony with the law of God, is that he should be delivered from the burden of the flesh. And by this he does not mean dying and going to heaven; he means, as you can see from the very next chapter, that the mortal body is somehow to become a spiritual body in which there shall no longer be any discord between duty and desire. "But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you." This passage means exactly what it says, and represents a mode of thought which has entirely passed away. It is an emphatic statement of the writer's expectation that a day would come when, at the quickening touch of the Spirit of God, the corruptible physical body would become a glorious spiritual body which would never again be subject to death or decay, and which would be a fitting outward expression of the angel-soul within. I repeat that we do not think that now. Nevertheless, the moral problem behind that expectation is ours still. Like Paul and his contemporaries, we want to know how to be delivered from this body of death, this mass of evil tendency within our nature which so often seems to set the will at nought.

How terribly real this problem is! Here, let us suppose, is a man in a high position, before the public eye. He is greatly respected and beloved, a man of talent and usefulness, as well as of much

force of character. He may be greatly looked up to in his particular circle and regarded as a model of probity. Suddenly, one day that man's reputation collapses like a house of cards. Something comes out about him which has been kept secret for a long time, but the publication of which immediately damns him with society. Perhaps he is unable to face the storm, and therefore chooses death or flies the country, perhaps he is not so fortunate as to find this mode of escape possible—his offence may have been one of which the law takes cognisance, and the first intimation which his friends receive of his fall is the news that he is in a prison cell. Picture the consternation among those who have loved and trusted him. Imagine the bewilderment and even agony of mind with which those who have received good from this man's inspiration and example now begin to wonder whether there is truth and honour to be found anywhere on earth. There may be some coarse natures who will be ready with their gibes and jeers and their brutal rejoicing over a fallen idol, but I think these are never numerous in proportion to the community as a whole; my own observation rather goes to prove that as a rule sorrow and pity predominate in the presence of such a moral tragedy. Perhaps there is a reason for this. It may arise from the fact that every man knows he carries within himself a very demon of hell that in an unguarded moment might fling him beside the ruined and the lost. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." The world's verdict is relentless, but not wholly unfeeling. The

flaming sword of human judgment bars the way back to the Eden from which the erring soul has been driven, but the angel who holds it has eyes of sadness. In Oscar Wilde's harrowing book, *De Profundis*, there is one touching paragraph in which the author describes his own anguish in the day of exposure, and the way in which one man behaved to him in that season of trial. He says:—

"Where there is sorrow there is holy ground.... When I was brought down from my prison to the Court of Bankruptcy between two policemen, a friend waited in the long, dreary corridor, that, before the whole crowd, whom an action so sweet and simple hushed into silence, he might gravely raise his hat to me, as, handcuffed with bowed head, I passed him by. Men have gone to heaven for smaller things than that. It was in this spirit, and with this mode of love, that the saints knelt down to wash the feet of the poor, or stooped to kiss the leper on the cheek. I have never said one single word to him about what he did. I do not know to the present moment whether he is aware that I was even conscious of his action. It is not a thing for which one can render formal thanks in formal words. I store it in the treasure-house of my heart. I keep it there as a secret debt that I am glad to think I can never possibly repay."

I have no doubt that this incident actually took place, for I think I know what prompted it. The man who took off his hat to the poor, crushed, broken-hearted prisoner was gifted with moral insight. He knew that the sufferer was not wholly

corrupt, so he bared his head to the diviner self that had never fallen. He knew that what had been worthy of respect in him before was no sham, but a reality, and was worthy of respect still. He knew, too, that no man is so superior to temptation that he can venture to despise his fallen brother; the difference in merit between the victor and the vanquished in such a strife is, perhaps, not so very great. In one man, passion may become a surging torrent, a volcanic eruption blasting and destroying all in a moment the whole moral beauty and fertility of a lifetime; in another, it may be a sinister presence against which God's warrior has continually to be on guard. And whether the issue is victory or defeat, no man who has ever fought the battle with Apollyon in the Valley of Humiliation should dare to despise the weaker soul who has been worsted in the same conflict. How fatally easy it is to trifle with the highest and deceive one's self as to what is actually taking place! How one false step leads to another! How closely the best in human nature is allied to the worst! How, almost insensibly, one can become entangled with evil in such a way that one's very moral obligations seem to render it more difficult to escape the sin! You do a wrong, and forthwith you find that to put it right you must inflict some anguish upon the innocent. What a hell for a sensitive soul is involved in the fact that every departure from rectitude creates a fresh set of relations which impose a further barrier in the way of getting back to purity and simplicity of life! As Lancelot confessed to King Arthur:

> In me lived a sin
> So strange, of such a kind, that all of pure,
> Noble, and knightly in me twined and clung
> Round that one sin, until the wholesome flower
> And poisonous grew together, each as each,
> Not to be pluck'd asunder.

We are all familiar, too, with that intractable type of character commonly called the ne'er-do-well. One member of a family is utterly different from all the rest in that from his childhood up he has seemed to lack ordinary moral perception. He may be lovable in disposition, kind and gentle in ordinary circumstances, but nothing that can be said or done will avail to save him from making a wreck of his career. He has little or no strength of will, unless a fatal obstinacy in the wrong direction can be regarded as strength of will. He breaks his promises without compunction. Again and again his friends provide him with a fresh start, only to find that they have been deceived and all their efforts rendered vain by the inherent viciousness of the abnormal nature with which they have to deal. There are special times, perhaps, when the poor creature loathes himself and sees a little of the sorrow and anguish he is causing, but these do not last long, and no one knows better than himself the reason why. And yet, surely, such cases are unexplainable by any ordinary theory of religion or morals. Why should a child be foredoomed from the cradle, as it were, to be a constant source of misery to himself and others and to baffle the very best that human love can do? We have no clearer answer to-day than was present to the mind of the writer of the epistle to the Romans ages ago.

I remember in my student days being asked to go and plead with a young man who had contracted the gambling habit, and, as is usually the case, had fallen a victim to other vices through the evil associations thus engendered. This man was well connected; heir to a flourishing business; the only son of parents who idolised him. He was happily married and had two beautiful children. One would have thought that there was not the slightest likelihood of such a man being tempted to give way to the practices which I was assured were ruining him. It was pitiful to watch the grief of those who loved him—and I soon found out that what they told me of his good qualities was the simple truth. But all one could say was useless. How well I remember the self-despair with which the poor fellow flung out his hands in a helpless gesture, saying as he did so: "It is no good your talking to me. I knew what you would say before you came; I could say it all myself. But I should only lie to you if I were to tell you that I could mend my ways, for I know I can't. There is something in my nature that is driving me straight to hell—indeed, I am in hell now. I do not enjoy the life I am leading. I do not know why I lead it. I am just carried on in spite of myself, and the sooner the end comes the better." I am afraid the end did come in the way anticipated. I never heard that there was any change for the better; probably this poor wretch went over the precipice of absolute ruin at last. It is easy to pass a hasty condemnation upon the unmanliness and contemptible weakness of such a man as this. We may detect signs of

defective home training in youth; may believe that a too indulgent mother may not have been wholly free from blame in sowing the seeds of habits which led to the inevitable catastrophe. But that does not explain everything; in fact, it explains very little. Any one whose work for God lies among the degraded and criminal classes will tell you that nothing is more utterly perplexing, or more bitterly discouraging, than to have to deal with inherent weakness of will and an innate tendency towards some particular form or forms of vice. They represent the problem of my text carried to the extreme. They represent, too, what we all know in some measure about ourselves. We are all weak of will somewhere; somewhere within us there lurks the enemy who might work our overthrow if we had nothing wherewith to resist him. We can neither expel nor destroy him completely. All our life through, and in all our activities, we have to remain conscious of this inner antagonism between the higher and the lower.

Now what is this lower? What is this principle of evil of whose presence we are all so immediately aware, and which in our weaker brethren is able to work such havoc and shame in spite of themselves? We can no longer pretend to account for it by saying that it is the result of a primeval fall of the race from purity, and yet it does not seem sufficient to say that it is our natural selfishness coming out. I dare say you all know that in my view an act of sin is an act of selfishness pure and simple. But the thing *behind* the sin is not necessarily selfishness any more than

cancer or madness is selfishness. What then is this dreadful thing that urges men downward? What does it spring from? Is it true, as the apostle says, that if we could get rid of the mass of tendency it represents we should be free to obey the law of God without let or hindrance? Well, I will tell you what I think it is. I believe it is the same divine force which, rightly directed, produces the greatest and worthiest human achievements. There is no tendency of human nature which is radically and essentially bad; as a tendency it is neither good nor bad, it is only an urge. Whether it shall be good or bad depends upon the direction we give to it. The very same electric current which launches a thunderbolt powerful enough to blast a landscape and destroy life and beauty may be harnessed to the service of man, drive his engines, grind his corn, and light his dwellings. The very same mountain torrent which uncontrolled will sweep whole villages to destruction and convert a smiling countryside into an inland sea may be used as the means of bringing life instead of death to the land upon which it descends. So it is with human nature. Look beneath every evil deed that was ever committed. Ask why it was what it was, and you will find that the force behind it might have been a means of blessing to the world instead of a curse to those upon whom it fell. There is in every man a Dr. Jekyll and a Mr. Hyde, and yet the two are one; the very same life force produces both. As to which shall appear all depends upon the objection given to that force. The great criminal is a great statesman or a great inventor gone to

waste. The gambler has the explorer's instinct, and with it all the making of a hero. Even the sensualist is not the victim of a passion in which he shares with the brutes instead of the gods—far from it. Without that passion no man could lift his gaze above the clod; it is present in every activity in which the highest human energies are engaged. No poet, no artist, has ever yet been without it or ever could be. No saint, in the truest sense of the word, but has been the product of it. The theologian may lack it, but the preacher never can; it is that mysterious, subtle, all-pervading essence of reality which not only draws man and woman together but binds all humanity into an indissoluble whole. It is that in you and me which bids us reach out to one another and join hands in the march towards our heavenly goal. It is a known fact, noted and commented upon by humanists and psychologists from generation to generation, that some of the finest examples of religious and artistic genius have been peculiarly prone to sins of the flesh. It has been surmised that this may have been the case with Paul himself, and that it is this fact which accounts for the language of this seventh of Romans. Be that as it may, the general fact is indisputable, and it is not impossible to see why. It is because those who have been the master spirits of the race on its highest planes of achievement have been those in which this unifying force has had the greatest sway. Once lower its objective, and it will become a death-dealer instead of a life-giver, like a live electric wire which falls from the sky into the muddy

street and kills the passers by. It is always so. Give a man self-expression along the highest plane of service, and he will cease to desire the lower; bind him to the lower, and you turn a god into a devil, and yet the force in either case is precisely the same. The demoniac energy of Saul the persecutor was afterwards seen in the holy zeal of Paul the apostle. It had found a higher objective, and with it a new spirit, that was all.

You have all heard of the French regiment, composed of convicts, which was sent to fight in Algeria. More uncompromising material wherewith to do great things could scarcely be imagined, and yet this band of criminals rose to the occasion and outshone most of the regular soldiery on the battlefield. How was it done? It was done by the faith of the colonel in command. He knew that men whose fearless energy had been exercised in preying upon their country might find an outlet for the same qualities in the service of that country, if only a beginning could be made. He made it by believing in them; treated them with respect; appealed to their higher manhood; gave them their flag—called it theirs, and bade them carry it to victory. One day an attack had to be made on an all but impregnable Moorish redoubt. First one regiment and then another of the finest soldiers in the French army was rolled back from that fatal eminence with heavy loss. At last came the turn of the scallywags. Their leader pointed first to the battered remnants of the troops that had already tried and failed, then to the grim height where their comrades lay, and said in a voice that all

could hear: "Soldiers! *Your* flag must fly up yonder." Not another word was needed. Away marched this company of burglars, forgers, hooligans, and pickpockets. Half-way up the hill their brave colonel fell dead. If there had been any doubt as to their behaviour before, there was none now. With cries of grief and anger they swept over the summit like a torrent of flame and planted their colours on the topmost peak of the enemy's fortress. Was there anything so very wonderful in this? Not at all. It was but the effect of the new direction given to an old force under the impulse of a higher spirit. I am told that a similar experiment is being made in the United States with men who have usually been considered a danger to society and to be guarded like wild beasts. The man who has found the more excellent way has made no effort to get any penal sentence remitted. He has simply taken those who have suffered for their sin, and given them a chance to express the very same characteristics which led to their undoing in some new and nobler way. "There is nothing unclean of itself"; whether it shall be clean or unclean is a question of the outcome.

There is, of course, a profound truth in the apostle's reasoning that the seat of evil is in the flesh, and it is this: the body is at once the expression and the limitation of the soul. It is the banks and bed of the river, the channel through which flows the current of the divine life. Here and there you may find that the banks have given way and the stream becomes a swamp. This is

what the world calls weakness of will or mortal atrophy. In some other case you will observe that the river has run away and lost itself in the sand instead of mingling its waters with the ocean. This is what we mean when we say that youthful promise has come to nothing for lack of the qualities which command success. And elsewhere we are compelled to watch with pain the flood of divine power flinging itself into some awful abyss or turning aside from the course in which it might have been the artery of a nation's commerce. In every case it is not the water that is to blame, but the bed in which it has been made to flow. Would you save the man who is weak of will and whose life has become a stagnant, ague-breeding pool? You must drain the swamp. Let the waters of blessing flow somewhere. Find out in what direction the divine urge would take him if the way were open; there is not a human being on earth who could not be made to feel the joy of self-expression in something that is for the good of all mankind. Once set the waters flowing and they will cut their own channel; you will find that the feeble soul has developed a will at last; the will is only the soul in movement, the whole man in action. Take him whose life has run to nothing or plunged with hellish force over the precipice of moral ruin. That river needs a new bed. Every evil deed is helping to cut the present channel a little deeper; better open a new one than try to stem the flood that pours along the old. Sometimes this will be a laborious process; sometimes it can be done at a stroke. But, whether the work is

swift or slow, believe that it can be done, and spare no effort to do it. To have faith in God is to have faith in man, the deeper man behind the deed whatever it may be. It is perfectly true that the law of sin is in the members, not in the man. As Juliana of Norwich has it: "There is in every man a godly will that hath never consented to sin nor ever shall." Appeal to that and the whole nature will respond.

In conclusion, suffer me to speak one word of help and encouragement, if I can, to those who have come in here only too sadly conscious of the antinomy described in my text. There may be something in your life which is to you a constant source of humiliation and dread—some evil habit, some secret vice, some temptation you cannot always resist, and which if it gains the mastery will compass your utter ruin, body and soul. I can well understand that in such a conflict you must be unable at times to say which is you—the devil with his fingers on your throat or the poor gasping soul that writhes in his cruel embrace. Well, do not question about it any more. The real you is not the fiend of hell, but the child of God. You have got to believe that and live it. Take that very propensity you loathe so much and make it beautiful. Baptise it into Christ. Look where its power comes from and link that power to the stars. Turn your weakness into strength. Let there be no doubt in your mind as to what God wants you to do and to be. You can achieve it by the spirit of Christ, and you do not need to look outside to find that. That spirit indwells you now, and is

stronger than all that would seek your hurt. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit. For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and of death."

XIV

SPIRITUAL STRENGTH

"*Strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man.*"—EPHES. iii. 16.

THE epistle to the Ephesians might more fitly be called the epistle *from* the Ephesians, for although it bears the name of St. Paul, and exhibits many traces of his influence, its affinities are rather with the Johannine writings, and the epistle to the Hebrews than with Romans and Corinthians. Knowing as we do that the metropolitan city of Ephesus was the great centre of the type of thought associated with the name of the apostle John, we can see some reason why this Christian writing should be described as addressed to Ephesians. If it did not originate in Ephesus it came from the hand of one who had received his Christian training in the Ephesian atmosphere.

But this fact has some interesting consequences. For one thing it did much to foster and encourage the great idea of the Catholic Church. Although not expressly stated, this idea permeates and colours all that the writer of this epistle has to say. It has been pointed out that Roman Catholic Christianity has drawn more support from the language of the epistle to the Ephesians than from all the Pauline

writings put together. How is this? Well, principally because Pauline Christianity begins with the individual, and emphasises continually the individual relationship of the Christian to his Lord; on the other hand, this Ephesian writer, while greatly indebted to the mysticism of St. Paul, makes far more of the thought of an ideal humanity in which every individual unit shall be merged and fulfilled in the life of the whole. Of course, it is quite clear that this conception is always present to the mind of St. Paul too, but he does not give it the all-dominating place which it occupies in this epistle. To the man who wrote our text the whole objective of the Christian revelation was the production of a perfect spiritual society rooted and grounded in Christ; in fact, he sometimes seems to lose sight of society in his assertion of something even higher, namely, the mystic unity of a redeemed human race.

The ideal is a very lofty one, and it is here set forth in a style appropriate to the theme. It is not the glowing, pointed, personal style of the apostle Paul, but it is not without a certain force and magic of its own. To catch the spirit of it we ought to realise that the early struggles between Jewish and Gentile Christianity are now over. You know, of course, to what I refer. Read the epistle to the Galatians, for instance, and see how bravely Paul fought for the inclusion of Gentiles within the benefits of the gospel of Christ on equal terms with converts of Jewish birth. We may wonder now that such a conflict was ever necessary, but it was. But by the time my text came to be written Paul's

battle had been won; there was no longer any distinction between Jew and Gentile in the Christian Church. Their unity had been cemented with blood, for both apparently had had to suffer terrible persecution at the hands of the Roman authorities. The writer of Ephesians refers to these things and urges his readers to rejoice more and more in the idea of a *spiritual unity* and to endeavour to realise it by every means in their power. Listen to the following sentences, and you will have a fairly accurate idea of the scope and purpose of the whole writing—

"That in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him (i. 10).

"Now, therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (ii. 19–22).

It is quite in the fitness of things that the writer should attribute this ideal to the apostle Paul, for the credit of having made it a reality belongs to him more than to any other man. Try to imagine the enormous difference which must have been made to the outlook of primitive Christianity by the burning words of the great apostle: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond

nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." We profess to take this for granted now, but it was a new idea then. The writer of Ephesians has become possessed by it and is full of enthusiasm for all that it means. He has no interest in a perfected individual as such; indeed, he does not believe in any such thing. Individual salvation would to him be meaningless apart from a regenerated humanity. It is upon this consummation that he dwells and insists from first to last. I have purposely drawn your attention to this governing thought in order that you may the better understand the bearing of our text. As it stands this passage might be regarded as a counsel for the individual only, but you can now see that it cannot be anything of the kind; whatever value it has can only be in its subordination to the general purpose of the whole epistle. If we keep this fact well in mind we shall be in no danger of misappropriating the meaning of this exhortation. The writer represents the apostle Paul as declaring that his prayer for his converts is that they may be strengthened with might in the inner man by the Spirit of God. We have seen the end he has in view, but what is this inner strengthening by which he hopes to see the end accomplished? That is what I want you to help me to find out.

You cannot fail to notice that the sentiment of this text closely resembles a good deal that we are hearing at the present time about the inner resources of the individual man. You are all more or less acquainted with what is generically termed the new thought, which in the main is what Professor

William James, of Harvard, would call the gospel of healthy-mindedness. It has a good many varieties, but in principle it is much the same everywhere. It amounts to this: If you want to be happy and prosperous you must call upon your indwelling divine strength. You must realise that all you can possibly want or desire is already within you, and that it rests with you to bring it into manifestation. Thus, if you are poor, you must believe that all the wealth of the universe is within you, waiting to be drawn upon; if you are sick, you must believe the same in respect to health; if circumstances seem to be against you, you must understand and act upon the conviction that the spiritual nature of man is subject to no limitations, and can neither be hampered nor imprisoned by material things. We are assured that if we will only live consistently in the power of this truth it will banish all sadness, gloom, depression, and sorrow of heart. Nothing will be able to injure us or cut us off from our divine heritage. All the evil and all the pain of the world would be destroyed at a stroke if only every man and woman in it could be persuaded to live upon this level and depend entirely upon the power of the indwelling Spirit of all good. One fully admits the force and the practical value of this principle, notwithstanding its occasional vulgar and materialistic applications. It is a re-emphasis of something which characterised the magnificent optimism of the first Christians, and which the modern world has sadly needed to hear again. Its truth is demonstrable, too. Once get a man to believe in his power to achieve a certain object, and

he has gone a long way towards doing it. There are many diseases which would yield to this kind of treatment, and perhaps the list can be indefinitely extended. Greatest of all the benefits of this method of looking at life is the buoyancy of spirit it engenders. What an enormous boon it is to be able to get rid of depression, discouragement, and fear of the future! Why, that alone is something to thank God for and rejoice. Most willingly, therefore, do I admit the positive moral value of this modern re-assertion of faith in the indwelling good.

But there is a point at which the practice of this principle often seems to fall short of the highest, and to become essentially different from Christianity. If some of its exponents are right, then Jesus Himself must have been mistaken when He died on Calvary. He need not have died; all He had to do was to realise the power of the indwelling good as sufficient to baffle all His foes and render all pain unnecessary. Why should He have shed one drop of blood? Why faint beneath the cross? Why utter that cry of dereliction: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Somehow we feel that, dark and terrible as was our Saviour's experience of the cross, it was grander and higher than the modern insistence upon an indwelling strength which secures immunity from it. Ponder this for a moment. I advance no theory to account for the fact; I simply point out that the power of the Gospel of Christ over the hearts and minds of men is the power of the cross. If Jesus had not died on Calvary; if He had never suffered a single

pang; if He had simply come to the world with the revelation of a principle which would secure to His followers exemption from all the ills that flesh is heir to, He would not be what He is to us to-day. He would be a less pathetic, but also a less sublime figure. Rightly or wrongly, mankind has always thought it a higher thing that Jesus should have been willing to die for the world than that He should have taught us how to live without suffering.

But there are other points in which some of the developments of the principle we are discussing are out of harmony with the facts of human experience. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now . . . waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God." The story of sentient life on this planet is truly a terrible one, and human history especially is one long tragedy. It is possible to exaggerate the horrific side of the conditions of our earthly existence, but no one will deny that from the dawn of history until to-day pain and struggle have been the accompaniment of all moral progress. No explanation that has ever yet been given of the presence of these things in God's world can be regarded as entirely satisfactory, but to say that they need not be here or that they can be eliminated by the simple expedient of believing in the power of the indwelling good is to trifle with a solemn subject. The problem is not so easily disposed of as all that. If this is all my text means it is a poor satisfaction to our overwhelming sense of need. Just think of it. Recorded human history runs back for nearly ten millenniums, and even that is but a moment in the span of human evolution. Has all the welter of agony and strife been a waste

and a blunder which man might have avoided if only he had known sooner how to summon at command his indwelling divine resources? In face of the colossal evils of organised human society today—the hunger and disease, the fierce battle for existence, the throes of anguish with which new ideas are born, the risings and fallings of nations and institutions—is it enough to say that the individual need only retire within himself in order to be master of it all without passing through the fire? I do not know how many people there may be here this morning, but I am quite certain that there are not a few heavy hearts, and I am equally certain that the best and most God-like man in this place is not the man who has learned the trick of avoiding all pain by relying upon some inward source of strength. Nor do we want to think that that is the aim of the best and noblest manhood of our day or any other day. We have something else to think of in life besides having a good time, and, even if the good time be one of refined happiness rather than sensuous delights, it is still a selfish thing to indulge it while the majority of our fellows remain exposed to storm and horror. We do not admire the man who spends his time in thinking how he may escape the labour and the pain of earthly existence.

And yet there is something to be said for the undying hope of human beings that it is possible to reach an altitude of greater calm and diviner joy than is the lot of those who never lift their gaze above the earth. There is an exaltation of soul which may know sorrow but forbids despair, a serenity of spirit which life's vicissitudes cannot

disturb. I believe Jesus had this, and I believe that every man who tries to live his life in the same spirit and to the same end as Jesus may have it too. This is a real thing, so real that those who have once experienced it can never mistake it for anything else. It is indeed a confident reliance upon that inexhaustible inward strength which is the birthright of every child of God. It is older than Christianity, but new every morning. It was what the Psalmist meant when he wrote: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee." And it is exactly what St. Paul means when he says: "Christ in you the hope of glory." But mark what it does. The man who becomes possessed by that spirit no longer makes it his first aim to secure immunity from the ills of life, but to pour forth his own divine resources for the realisation of the spiritual unity of mankind. He cannot make his own well-being an object at all, and yet he can do nothing else but make war on human sin and sorrow. He cannot spare himself, but he can and does become strong to bear the burdens and heal the wounds of suffering humanity. The spiritual man can never be a weak man, for his strength is the strength of God, but it is only his for the work he has to do and the end he has to achieve. It is a supply which enables him to do without some things that the ordinary man counts a necessity, and to accomplish some things with ease and joy at which the ordinary man faints and fears. For example, there are occasions when he can do without sympathy, greatly as he might desire to have it. There is nothing more pathetically human in the experience of Jesus in Gethsemane

than His longing that His friends should understand and bear Him company in His trouble, and there is nothing more sublime than the way in which He showed Himself able to do without them when the crisis came; they were all stupefied and panic stricken, He alone was calm and strong. Where did this come from? It came from the consciousness that He had given to the service of God all He had to give, and had nothing to ask for or expect so far as He Himself was concerned. Grand, lonely soul! "Behold, the hour cometh . . . that ye shall be scattered every man to his own and shall leave Me alone, and yet I am not alone because the Father is with Me." This again, you see, is a real thing, a mysterious source of supernatural strength, an inward reality of which nothing can rob him whose life is offered for high impersonal ends—in a word, who has given himself to that spiritual unity in which all men are one.

I have said that this superhuman strength enables the spiritual man not only to do without ordinary human aids, but to dare and achieve that at which the natural man shrinks and trembles. I am not sure that it is easy to say when and how the natural man passes into the higher experience. It is impossible for human wisdom to draw fine distinctions on this point. I would prefer to say that in every human being the material and the spiritual are contrasted every moment, and that you pass from one to the other according to the motive and emotion from which you act. Listen to the following short paragraph from the latest book of Mr. H. G. Wells. The writer is describing with the pen of a master the scenes witnessed by himself and a friend during

a moonlight walk along the Thames Embankment one evening this winter.

"Along the Embankment, you see, there are iron seats at regular intervals, seats you cannot lie upon, because iron arm-rests prevent that, and each seat, one saw by the lamplight, was filled with crouching and drooping figures. Not a vacant place remained, not one vacant place. These were the homeless, and they had come to sleep here. Now one noted a poor old woman with a shameful battered straw hat awry over her drowsing face, now a young clerk staring before him at despair; now a filthy tramp, and now a bearded, frock-coated, collarless respectability. I remember particularly one ghastly long white neck and white face that lopped backward, choked in some nightmare, awakened, clutched with a bony hand at the bony throat, and sat up and stared angrily as we passed. The wind had a keen edge that night even for us, who had dined and were well clad. One crumpled figure coughed and went on coughing—damnably. . . .

"'Great God!' cried I. . . . 'But must life always be like this? I could die—indeed, I would willingly jump into this cold and muddy river now, if by so doing I could stick a stiff dead hand through all these things—into the future; a dead commanding hand insisting with a silent, irresistible gesture that this waste and failure of life should cease, and cease for ever.'"

There is the true ring about that utterance. Knowing Mr. Wells as I do, I know that it is not mere rhetoric; its enthralling force springs from its sincerity. If it is not the spiritual man who

speaks here, then I have never met the spiritual man. The writer of this passage may have dropped down from the level here indicated within the next five minutes after he spoke, but for the moment his word was the word of Christ, and it was his noblest, divinest self that spoke. Here was a man strong enough to die without hope of resurrection for the sake of the suffering world of men and women of which he was a solitary unit. Now that, and nothing less than that, is implied in my text. To be strengthened with might in the inner man is so to live as to lose sight of all personal aims and desires in the one over-mastering emotion of love to God and man. It means dying upon the cross of self-hood to live again in the glorious up-rising of a redeemed humanity to the eternal Father.

Let me see whether there is not in this some personal word for you who hear me this morning. Ill-used people have come in here just now, sorrowful people, people with burdens grievous to be borne. There are some of you whose hearts are filled with bitterness because of what you have lately had to endure in the awful struggle to live, and by that I do not mean necessarily that you are afraid of not having enough to eat. I mean things even more torturing than the prospect of physical discomfort. There is the surprise of treachery; the shock of the discovery of the weakness or wickedness of a loved one; the wretched misunderstanding that tears one heart away from another without hope of remedy. There are times in life when all the forces of hell seem to conspire against you at once, and you are almost forced to disbelieve that there can be meaning or purpose or guiding hand

behind the chaos. Men say that prosperity is often disintegrating to the moral nature, whereas adversity braces and energises it; my observation teaches me that, as often as not, a man will prove too weak to endure adversity and preserve his faith in good who could have remained unharmed and lovable in kinder circumstances. Yes, I have seen more than one man's soul expanding under the genial influence of moderate success, and then chilled and blighted by the winter frost of failure and calamity; they have not been strong enough to bear the worst.

To all here this morning who feel their moral weakness in face of the evil of life, I have but one word to say. You must try not to take the personal view. Break free from it at all costs, for it is fatal to the higher life. Take the view of Jesus that your life is only yours because it belongs to us all. There is always turmoil, always danger and insecurity, in the life that is bounded by the thought of self. Let go, and push out into the full ocean of the love of God, and see how grandly it will bear you. Just realise that your life is only yours to give away, and you can safely trust it in the keeping of Him by whom the very hairs of your head are all numbered. You will be omnipotent and invincible in the work of the Lord, and none can rob you of your peace, for you have no selfish end to gain. I need not say, Be strong, for this in itself is strength, this consciousness that God is reaching out through you to strike the fetters from the limbs of His children and open their prison doors.

XV

FAMINE AND PLENTY

"A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine."—REV. vi. 6.

THIS is another of those cryptic sayings from the book of Revelation which, so far as external form is concerned, convey so little to the modern mind. I question whether there are very many in the congregation this morning who have ever thought about these words before, and yet they relate to a kind of human experience which has repeated itself a good many times in ages past and still constitutes a formidable problem for the world. You will soon see what that experience is if we try to go back a little into history and see with the eyes of the writer of this sentence. There is a message in his words too—a warning and an appeal. It is my duty to bring out both and set them before you as well as I can.

From what I have previously said about this book of Revelation you will not be surprised if I ask you to put aside all idea that this passage has any specific reference to events which have yet to take place. An enormous amount of time has been wasted in the past by those who have taken for granted that the symbolism of this strange book is

a veiled forecast of the history of mankind right on to our own times and even beyond them. It is nothing of the sort. It is a description of what was taking place there and then. The man, or men, who wrote this book never anticipated that the world would go on as long as it has or that history would shape itself as has proved to be the case. Perhaps I ought rather to say they never anticipated that the world would go on sinning and suffering as it has; they certainly thought it would go on, but they were hoping for a speedy advent of Christ and a thorough regeneration of human affairs—a kind of supernatural social revolution, after which things would go on happily and prosperously for ever. It is difficult for modern readers of the New Testament to grasp this point of view; I have no doubt that to some of my hearers at this moment it is entirely new, but if you can once get hold of it you will find that it will light up the whole of the New Testament for you in a marvellous way. I think you will find that it will help to make some parts of it much more interesting than before. Suppose we occupy a few minutes now in trying to see with the eyes of the man who wrote the part of the book of Revelation which contains my text. We must try to imagine quite a different world from that in which you and I live now. For one thing it was not so large. All civilisation—or nearly all—was comprised in the communities which lay around the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. I suppose you know why this sheet of water was called the Mediterranean; it was because it lay, as the name implies, in the

middle of the civilised world. Just at the time when Christianity began its career all this vast territory had been brought under the dominion of the Roman Cæsars; it was one enormous empire held together by military strength. Many different races lay within its mighty grip; Rome had no rival, and her reigning emperor, whoever he might be, was therefore fittingly called "lord of the world." Political freedom had been crushed out, although in other respects the Roman policy was to be tolerant of local and national customs and religions.

But there was one religion of which Rome was not tolerant, and that was the new faith which was becoming known as Christianity. Christianity was not respectable then; it was despised and dreaded in much the same way as Socialism is now, and for very similar reasons. If the Christian preachers of that day had only confined themselves to preaching the hope of immortality, and telling men to believe in the atoning work of Christ in order that they might go to heaven when they died, you may be quite sure they would have had to suffer no persecution for their opinions; Rome would only have laughed at them as crazy visionaries. But when we find that, instead of laughing, even the strongest of the Roman emperors—such as Domitian and Marcus Aurelius—regarded them as a danger, and adopted the most rigorous methods in order to stamp out their teaching, we know at once that the Christian evangel must have been one that assailed the existing political and social order and threatened its overthrow. Now this is exactly

what was taking place. Under the enthusiasm of the new spirit which the religion of Jesus had poured forth upon the world, thousands of men and women were proclaiming the overthrow of materialism, tyranny, privilege, pride of place and power, cruelty, and the exploitation of the many for the benefit of the few. The gospel which was preached in the name of Jesus was not merely the promise of plenty to eat and drink, but of human happiness, brotherhood, and exalted spiritual achievement. The followers of Jesus fired the imagination of mankind with the hope, or rather the confident expectation, of an ideal world from which poverty and oppression should disappear for ever They told men plainly that society as it was then organised was contrary to the divine will and altogether inconsistent with the ideal of their Master. They maintained that in the new order there would be no Cæsar and no sword. Is it any wonder that the Cæsars began to dread the spread of such revolutionary opinions? If all men accepted them it would mean a speedy end of their dominion. You know, too, I suppose, how the Christians thought the great change was going to come about. They believed that before very long Jesus would appear and dethrone Cæsar, as well as all the Herods and Pilates who were his subordinates in the various provinces of this world-wide empire. When this was done Jesus would mount the throne himself, and reign with undisputed sway over a perfectly contented and happy human society, which would be called the Kingdom of God. In one way they were mistaken in expecting this; the Christ has

never come in that way, and it would not be the best and most desirable thing that He should; it would only be an external deliverance after all if He did, and the world needs something more thorough than that. But in the main they were absolutely right. The one great thing that the world needs is that the spirit of Christ, which is the spirit of brotherhood, should expel the spirit of materialism, selfishness, and hate. That change is coming, and its victory, though slow, will be sure.

But at the time when my text was written all these Christians believed it to be quite near at hand. They saw that this vast and heterogeneous Roman dominion was seething with discontent. They saw one-third of the total population held in wretched and cruel slavery. They saw how cheaply human life was regarded and how merciless those in power were to those who opposed them. Every day some of their own number were dragged off to prison, torture, or death. Delicate women as well as strong men were flogged in the streets or thrown to the lions in the amphitheatres. A devil incarnate like the Emperor Nero burned them alive as an entertainment for his guests at a garden party. What a garden party! and what guests! Well might Anthony Trollope say that bad as men are to-day, we may thank God they are not as men were in the days of the Cæsars. All this fierce persecution, and terrible suffering—suffering which they shared with all the enslaved and downtrodden among the subjects of the Roman Empire—was to the Christians the travail which was having to be

[illegible] the birth of the new order. So [illegible] together in their assemblies in one [illegible] houses or in the dark catacombs under-[illegible] used to sing with a fervour their [illegible]:

> [illegible] to God in the highest,
> [illegible] on earth peace,
> [illegible] will [illegible] men.

[illegible] this is what many of them [illegible] this was the great ideal that carried [illegible]. They believed in it with all their [illegible] and if their successors had gone on believing [illegible] the same way we should have had it long before now. They believed that all the tribulation which was overtaking the empire was the beginning of the end. Christ in heaven was opening the seals of judgment, and with the opening of the last He Himself would appear on earth and drive all evil out before Him. The opening of the seals as described in the chapter before us is therefore simply a description of what was actually going on in the world at that moment. It was the break-up of the Roman empire. The rider on the white horse, for instance, with the bow in his hand represents the barbarous invaders who were attacking the empire from the east and north-east. They were called the Parthians, and were irregular cavalry like the modern Cossacks. These wild warriors were swift and fearless riders who could use the bow and arrow with deadly precision. The rider on the red horse stands for civil war: every now and then some successful Roman general tried

to make himself emperor, and occasionally one succeeded. The black horse and his rider represent famine, just as the pale horse meant plague and pestilence. All these things were going on there and then—invasion, civil strife, hunger and want, disease and death. It was the break-up of an old order and the beginning of a new. Unfortunately that new order did not produce the ideal of which these first Christians dreamed. The very things against which they inveighed most earnestly were continued under new forms. The old problems are here still, not so terrible perhaps, but terrible enough to any lover of humanity.

Now that we see what was meant by the symbolism of the ride on the black horse let us look a little more closely into the actual language of the text. As this spectre of famine leaps forth upon the earth, holding up the balances in his hand, a voice from heaven seems to say: "A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine." What a curious utterance! Here is a piece of fine irony indeed! This measure of wheat was one person's allowance for one day. The penny was worth between sixpence and sevenpence of our money, and its purchasing power measured by present-day standards would amount to several shillings; this was therefore a famine price for food. Barley was the coarse bread of the poor, the plainest and cheapest that could be got; here was the famine price for a family of three. The oil and the wine were the luxury of the rich, and at this time the luxury of the Roman capital had become shameless

and brutal. Utterly regardless of the sufferings of the lower ranks of society, the privileged orders in the State vied with each other in wallowing in the most senseless extravagance. Thus we read of the emperor having his dish of peacocks' tongues and his baths of wine and milk; or of the senator who caused a slave to be flung to the lampreys in the miniature lake which occupied the centre of his enormous dining hall. The slave's offence was some small breach of etiquette in serving at table. The guests were much annoyed at the sentence, not because of the horrible death of the slave, but because of the noise he made fighting for his life, which they considered a breach of decorum! His owner ought to have had his throat cut quietly in a back room instead of being guilty of the bad form of allowing his screams of agony to interfere with the comfort of his guests to such an extent as to interrupt their refined conversation! Not a suggestion of pity! Not the faintest perception, apparently, that all their heartless luxury was draining away the life-blood of groaning millions far beyond the stately walls of the imperial city. This is where the irony of the text comes in. The poor are starving for bread, but the oil and the wine are as plentiful as ever on the table and in the toilet of their cruel masters. How long was this to last? We know that it did not last. The Christians called it wickedness, and prophesied its doom. The doom came. Rome fell. That corrupt and inhuman state of things was swept away by the raging torrent of barbarism that broke forth upon the empire of the Cæsars. The writer of my text was right: Luxury,

hand in hand with callous cruelty, was the beginning of the end.

We have now reached another turning-point in history, when men are asking themselves whether the ideals they have been used to are morally justifiable or communally wise. It seems to me that if the man who wrote the sentence which forms my text could be brought back from the unseen world and placed in our midst in London to-day, he might think his words had still a certain applicability to the condition of society. I have no doubt he would be greatly surprised to find that it was so. He would realise that the Roman empire had gone, but that the Kingdom of God had not come. He would miss the Roman soldier, but would find Europe an armed camp. He would expect to find no poor; what then would he think as he saw our slums and workhouses? Above all, he would be surprised and confounded to behold Christianity enthroned and endowed while the very thing against which its evangel was originally directed was still flourishing before our very eyes. He would wonder what new brand of Christianity this was; he would be able to recognise in it little except the name. He would see earnest servants of God at work everywhere endeavouring to deal kindly with the sunken and degraded, but he would be astonished beyond measure to find that the average Christian thought of poverty and misery as part of the natural order of things, to go on as long as the world lasted. This would be a new gospel to him, and to call it Christianity would puzzle him until he got used to it; I question if he ever would get used to it. If he

came into church this morning I wonder what he would think. He would see me up here preaching, and you down there listening, but he would want to know why we took the trouble to come and what was to be the outcome of our meeting together. If he picked up an ordinary religious newspaper—supposing him able to read English—and read long screeds about the eastward position at communion, the carrying of the gospel—which means a new set of opinions—to the heathen, the deplorable and growing indifference to "sin," and such-like, he would be still more at sea. If he heard that a wealthy peer, whose income was derived from rents for which he never did a stroke of work or from the labour of operatives whom he never saw, was holding forth on a mission platform about the decay of the sense of sin he would want to know what he meant by sin. See here, he would say, the only sin in the world is that of making or keeping people degraded and wretched. What other kind of sin can there be? What are you doing to remove the root causes of suffering and shame? If you have power why don't you use it? Are you content that thousands upon thousands of your fellow-creatures have to live the life of brutes or fight hard to live at all while you can enjoy the best, and pass from one interest to another at your pleasure? The rider on the black horse is still holding up his balances, and it is a niggardly dole that he measures out to the poor and unfortunate; he does not touch your oil and wine; your place in life is secure; you have no anxiety about the future; hard winters and loss of employment do not affect you. What is it, then,

that you are preaching about? Sin against God? What is sin against God but doing or permitting harm against man? Put yourself in your brother's place. Suppose that this very day some man or body of men were in a position to take away your oil and wine and reduce you to barley bread, the price of which you would have to slave for from morn till eve, from year to year, and even then were not always sure of it. Suppose your refined surroundings disappeared, your refined friends likewise, and that your abode were the slum, not of your own will but some one else's! Do you think it would make any difference to your views about sin and salvation and the service of God?

I say that if the writer of this text could come back among us, and really understood what was going on, this is much the way in which he would speak to us. There would be no mistake about it. Perhaps he would speak more harshly, for he would be shocked and scandalised to find that Christianity had not done more than it has to regenerate the world. He would detect the false note at once in our conventional preaching and praying. He would tell us that it was all nonsense that men needed to be saved from the wrath of God in the next world; he would say that they needed to be saved from one another in this. There is a truth in the doctrine of the wrath of God, but it is not what is commonly preached. If God's judgments descend upon unrighteousness the test will be, "Inasmuch as ye did it or did it not." He would tell us that as Christians what we have to do is to denounce and make war upon everything which is

contrary to the spirit of Jesus, whether in our public institutions or our private conduct. He would insist that compromise is treason. He would declare that we have no business to call ourselves the followers of Jesus while continuing to accept and profit by conditions which put a barrier between us and our fellows. He would simply point to facts. He would say, Here are the very things for protesting against which the Christians of the first century were persecuted and put to death. Why have you made terms with them? Here are still the power of wealth, the power of high position, the power of the sword. Here on the other hand are poverty, misery, and crime. Why is it not a struggle to the death between you and all these? There ought to have been an end of these things eighteen hundred years ago. Christianity and these things ought not to be able to live together in the same world; one ought to have killed the other long ago. Perhaps one has killed the other. Your respectable Christianity is something more than a failure; is it Christianity at all?

In speaking like this I am conscious that my words are open to a certain misconstruction. They seem like a sweeping indictment of the faith which I myself believe and profess. But it is far indeed from being that. I know only too well how easy it is for an ideal to lose force when it becomes embodied in an institution. As soon as it has tasted the oil and wine of worldly power and affluence it loses vigour without being absolutely destroyed. Its vision becomes less clear, and energy becomes dissipated in side issues. This is what has happened to the religion of Jesus. Broadly speaking

it has ceased to lead the world because it has forgotten what it set out to do for the world. The famine is here still; the great mass of toiling, suffering men and women are crying out for more abundant life, and most of us have failed even to see the greatness of the need. We do not understand it. The burden-bearers of mankind have only the three measures of barley, while our great anxiety is that they should not interfere with our oil and wine. If they do we call them materialists, and point out that the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink. No more it is, but neither is it the oil and wine. It is brotherhood, not privilege and exclusiveness. Here is an issue before us which there is no possibility of avoiding: While there is a single man, woman, or child going hungry or degraded, unable to think of anything but hand-to-mouth existence, in Christendom to-day, the Kingdom of God has not come; and if, in the presence of such a state of things, professing Christians are content to declare it inevitable, and to organise in defence of their own oil and wine, they have forgotten all about what the original Christianity came to do.

But this is not the only kind of application which my text ought to receive. It reaches down very deep into the human heart, and into the most intimate human relationships. All through our common experience runs this contrast between famine and plenty, the measure of barley and the oil and wine. Observe how often in human affairs one man will not only remain indifferent to the privation of another, but even cause it, and yet never dream of holding himself culpable. Here, for instance, is some glaring wrong which has to be set right. In

such a world as ours the man who moves in that direction has inevitably to take risks, and one of the greatest of these risks is that he may be deserted at the critical moment by those upon whom he thought he could depend. They may see the matter as plainly as he, but they have no intention of exchanging their oil and wine for barley bread. It is nice to be thought well of, to be praised for moderation, to be looked upon as above all things a "safe" man, which is only another word for a coward. You may have this agreeable experience if you are only willing to fulfil the conditions. All you have to do is to sell your soul: act a lie without saying it; sacrifice the friend whom you know to be perfectly in the right, but whom you do not find it convenient to acknowledge. It would be still more to your advantage if you could work up a little indignation and denounce him. See what follows: you have made his task harder; you have not only left him to bear the shock of events alone, you have isolated him and intensified the odds against which he has to strive. For him the externals of life are poor and dark; for you they are rich and bright. He has the barley bread; you have the oil and wine. Yet, oh coward soul, he knows more of the kingdom of truth than you. He is a son of the morning, and you a child of the night. Heaven has left you your oil and wine, but they are a poor compensation for all that you have missed.

Ah, yes, life is a strange medley. The rider on the black horse is always passing to and fro amid the busy haunts of men. Happy are those who fear not the famine so long as they may be true to themselves and God; most wretched are they who think

about nothing but the oil and the wine. To hear men talk one would think nothing mattered in comparison with being successful and comfortable in the things of this world. How they scream out when these are threatened! "Oh, do not ask me for anything that involves trouble, inconvenience, self-sacrifice!" is their general attitude. "Calvary is very nice to sing about, but we do not want any Calvaries now. Do not seek anything from us that involves privation, loss, loneliness, or meagre joys; we believe in being God's beneficiaries, not His pioneers." And God takes them at their word. If a man wants that kind of life he can have it. Of all forms of materialism the worst and subtlest are those which masquerade as Christian virtues—your smug respectability, your smooth hypocrisy, your careful avoidance of everything reprehensible, your silence in the presence of what you know to be mean, base, and wicked; your unwillingness to face the right or wrong of that from which you happen to benefit; your tacit support of that which in your heart of hearts you know means the suffering of others that you may enjoy. The sentence of heaven is passed upon you, "See that thou hurt not the oil and the wine." You can keep them until the last enemy of all rides forth, and his name is death. God has given no instructions to death to spare the coward and the time-server. And then—why then I think there will be some surprises in store. The last thing that would be possible in a well-ordered universe would be that those who have chosen the easy road here should find it equally easy in the world to come. And I mean exactly what I say when I add that this category will

include the great majority of those who are regarded as the leaders of light and order in this world. Most of them would be utterly contemptible if they were not so pitiable. To be a real follower of Christ, and yet on good terms with the established order in Church and State, is a sheer impossibility.

So, as we part company this morning, let me ask you to search your hearts in the light of my text and see where you stand. The rider on the black horse is going by your door this very day. There will be plenty of suffering where he passes—famine of substance, famine of friendship, famine of opportunity and earthly joy. He is in this church at this moment. There are some people here now to whom he is doling out the meagre fare that is the bread of sorrow. Poor children of pain, I am not talking to you: I am talking to the man who spends most of his time in caring for the outside of life. That grim rider may let him alone and leave him to his oil and wine. Yet when the last seal is broken, and the naked soul stands face to face with Christ, the barley bread which has been the portion of the servant of truth and right will be seen to have been infinitely preferable to the oil and wine of selfishness and material gain. If we all knew now what we shall all know then, there would be no hesitation about our choice. Better the worst in the service of Christ—the real Christ—than the best without Him. Better the famine and be true, than the oil and wine with the lie. Better all the suffering of life put together than miss the glory of the Kingdom of love.

XVI

THE SILENCE OF HEAVEN

"And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour."—REV. viii. 1.

SOME of you may be thinking that this is a strange text, and so indeed it is. But it appears in an equally strange setting, and if we can do anything towards understanding the one perhaps we may be able to understand the other. I do not remember having taken a text from the Book of Revelation on a Thursday morning before, although I have more than once done so on Sunday. It may be as well, therefore, to state in a few words the general point of view from which to approach this book, and with which my Sunday congregation is already, I hope, fairly familiar.

To call this book the Book of Revelation is a somewhat curious use of terms; it might more appropriately be designated the book of obscuration, for I will defy any one to tell us in detail what it means. It has always possessed a fascination for those who like to peer into the future, and who take for granted that such apocalyptic writings as this and the Book of Daniel were intended as an elaborate forecast of events which have yet to take place

in the history of the world. Unfortunately for the interpretations which have been given, and are still being given, no two of them agree even in fundamentals. We used to be assured, for instance, that the Scarlet Woman was the Church of Rome; I believe there was a novel written not long ago with this title which professed to expose some of the enormities of that Church. But nothing is more certain than that, whatever else the writer of the Book of Revelation may have foreseen, he never foresaw the Church of Rome as she exists to-day, and never dreamed of associating her with the Scarlet Woman. As for the Anti-Christ referred to in these pages, heaven only knows how many historical characters have been cast for the part even in recent years. About the time I was born I think Napoleon III was the favourite, but he dropped out of the running after the battle of Sedan. I saw on a railway bookstall the other day the current issue of a religious newspaper which still makes a feature of interpreting these supposed prophecies, just as it used to do in my young days, and I could not help wondering what public character the editor had fixed upon as Anti-Christ now; I should not be in the least surprised if it turned out to be myself. I have more than once had the honour of being told that I was undoubtedly the beast of the Book of Revelation; I humbly hope that you do not believe it.

But with a congregation of sensible men and women there is surely little need to point out that the writer of this book never looked as far ahead as the times in which we live, and his pictures of

the future have no relation whatever to what is taking place now or may take place a thousand years hence. He was writing about his own times, not about ours. His outlook was dominated by the belief, which all the early Christians held, that the world would come to an end very speedily—or, rather, that a general judgment would soon take place at which all evildoers would be cast out of the earth and the Kingdom of God established with Christ as the King. It might be a matter of a few months, or even a few years, before this grand consummation would take place, but no Christian thought of it as being the slow growth of centuries. If you will read the Book of Revelation from this point of view much of its language will become clearer; you will see, for instance, that the beautiful picture of the New Jerusalem contained in the last two chapters refers to the regeneration of this world, not to a heaven beyond the tomb. "And I saw the holy city," etc. It was clear to our writer that before this new order could be established all the existing world-powers would have to be overthrown. Of these by far the greatest was the Roman Empire. No doubt this was the Scarlet Woman, and, as the book was evidently written at a time when the Christians were being fiercely persecuted, it is quite probable that the beast was the infamous emperor Nero. The whole scheme of this book is therefore a picture of the times in which it was written, together with a description of the catastrophes which the writer believed to be impending, presented in language with which his readers would be more or less familiar. The elaborate use of symbolism is

confusing to us, but it was not so to them. To a considerable part of it we do not possess the key, for our mental dialect is different. This was quite a familiar style of writing in the early Christian centuries, and even before. We cannot expect to understand all this elaborate symbolism, any more than the people for whom it was written would understand the allusions in the *Times* or the *Daily Mail* of to-day's issue; the whole situation has changed, and an entirely different set of facts occupies the field of our mental vision.

But when we come to such a passage as our text we are not without light as to the writer's meaning and the true spiritual significance of what he says. He imagines the purposes of God concerning mankind as being a sealed book which only the glorified Christ is able to open, that is, he thinks of Christ as the arbiter of human destiny. He sees this book of divine judgment sealed with seven seals, and as the hand of Christ opens them one by one the whole panorama of portentous events unrolls itself before Him. The interesting part of this conception is that it is intended as a survey of what was taking place in the world soon after the beginning of the Christian era. Thus, after the opening of the first seal, there went forth a rider on a white horse. According to Professor Ramsay this figure stands for the Parthians, who were at this time a terrible scourge on one of the borders of the unwieldy dominion of the Cæsars; what these invaders were doing at this moment was causing as much vivid interest in this ancient world as, say, the revolutionaries in Russia or the exploits of Dinizulu are causing to us to-day.

The writer saw in these things the break-up of the established order; and he was quite right, they were the beginning of the end of the world-wide Roman Empire. But he maintains, too, that all these great events were shaping themselves in accordance with the will of God and the coming of the Kingdom of Christ. Should we not all agree with him? Is there anything meaningless or accidental in the affairs of men? And is it not true that in all the great crises of history since Christianity began the name and influence of Jesus have played an increasing part, until to-day we should one and all confess that to take Jesus out of Western civilisation would be an impossibility? So far from losing ground, He is gaining it; so far from counting for less, He is counting for more. We are all watching the decline of an old order and the coming of a new, and we all fervently believe that the new order when it comes will mean the triumph of the spirit and teaching of Jesus. Thus, this man saw pretty clearly, notwithstanding his limited outlook upon the future. The principal difference between him and ourselves is that he believed the triumph of Jesus would come about quickly and catastrophically, whereas the lessons of history have taught us to regard it as coming slowly, though inevitably, by the quiet operation of the divine spirit of love and brotherhood. Spiritually, the writer of the Book of Revelation foresaw exactly what we see to be coming now, although the events of contemporary history which occupied so much of his attention have long ceased to possess living interest for us. But what does that matter? He believed in the

victory of all that the name of Jesus stands for—the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God—and so do we.

You observe that the silence of which our text speaks took place after the opening of the last seal. Can you not now see what this means? There is something pathetic and yet beautiful suggested here. This man was so fully persuaded that the end of all the wickedness and suffering of mankind was just at hand that he believed the seal of God's last judgment had already been opened, and that the long-expected reign of righteousness and peace would immediately ensue. But it did not come. There was no descent of Christ on the clouds of heaven; no sudden flaming of Divine splendour; no innumerable angel host coming to the rescue of stricken humanity. Instead, the welter of sorrow, and anguish, and oppression went on, and God made no sign—"there was silence in heaven." But it cannot be long, thought the seer. The last seal is broken, it will only be a little while that we shall have to wait; there is a pause in the activities of God, a silence during which no sound is heard but the moans of those who are being trampled under foot by shame and wrong; but, compared with the grief and darkness behind, this silence of God is but short—only half-an-hour. It is a climax. God sits with uplifted hand, and all the songs of heaven are hushed to an unbroken stillness while the multitude, which no man can number, listens in solemn sympathy to the sad appeals of their brethren who lie unhelped in the darkness below. The glorified angel host forget their own blessed-

ness, forget even their pæans of praise to the Almighty; their gaze is no longer upward upon the eternal glory, but downward upon the struggles and sufferings of men. They cannot hear their own harmonies; they can only hear the sad music of humanity. Their stillness is not the stillness of indifference, but of concentrated compassion. When that half-hour of silence is broken it will not be by a re-striking of the harps of gold, but by the torrential down-rush of heaven to the rescue of imprisoned souls on earth. That half-hour's pause is the hush before the tornado; it is the cessation of every divine activity except a sympathetic scrutiny of the needs and hopes of the blind world that is calling out for God.

This, I am sure, is what the writer of my text meant to convey by this impressive and even dramatic interlude. But how far is it true? Has it really any significance which we can fairly appropriate? We all know of the silence of heaven, but it has lasted longer than half-an-hour. Indeed, the last seal has not yet been broken, and there may be more seals to break, but we have not had much indication that heaven is in any hurry to come to our deliverance. On goes the storm of anguish and heart-break, of toil and slavery, of battle and murder, of secret sin and open infamy, of plague and pestilence, of robbery and starvation, the ceaseless warfare of evil and good, in which the latter so often seems to be the loser. On, on it goes, and, whether Heaven has paused to listen or not, it makes no sign. From that side of things there is only silence.

Yet, stay! Is this all there is to be said on the subject? By no means. The charges sometimes brought against us preachers are that we speak without discernment, that we treat our hearers to sentimental satisfactions, and that we know no more about the real meaning of life than our forefathers did or the wise and prudent among us know now. The question is being put to us with increasing force, How do you know? Which of you is right? What can you really be sure of? Some of you say one thing and some another, but amid all your religious clamour there is very little that is permanently helpful or satisfying. All your theories break down in presence of the hard facts of life. How do you know there is a God? Have you ever been to the further side of things to see? How can you tell that your Christ of ages past did not make an end when they laid Him in a bloody grave? What tokens have you that He is still able to affect the destinies of humanity? If there be a God, or a Christ, or a heaven of glorified beings, what are they all doing while man stumbles along in his blindness eating his own flesh?

These are powerful questions, challenges which pessimism has put to faith in all ages, and never more than in our own. Nevertheless, I think there is an answer, and I think, too, that it is something more than theory. It is far older than Christianity, but in Christianity it mounted to its highest expression. I mean the witness of the strong soul to that which is stronger and higher than itself. There is one universal doctrine in which all men profess to believe, and that is the doctrine of the supremacy

of the cross. We might call this the changeless creed of the human race. It is essentially Christian, but it is not exclusively Christian; it would be a bad thing if it were. I am sure you all know what I mean. I mean that inner conviction of every soul that has ever come to moral consciousness that the highest thing a man can do with his life is to lay it down for the sake of the universal life. I will make bold to say that there is not a single man in this church this morning who does not believe that, although he might express it differently and hedge it round with all kinds of qualifications. I know for a fact that there are men here every Thursday who would profess themselves agnostics in regard to the meaning of life, but I am certain their agnosticism would stop short here. They would tell me they do not know whether there is a God or a life to come, and they might deny my right to affirm either of these from personal knowledge, but they could no more help agreeing with me about the supremacy of the cross than they could help believing in their own manhood; in fact, to deny the one is to deny the other.

Now, is not this a marvellous and impressive thing? Go back as far as you like in human history, and you will find it; examine the ideals of the most advanced civilisation—if we can agree as to what is the most advanced civilisation—and you will still find it in the foreground. The savage knows it in spite of his bestiality, and the saint reverences it in his hours of highest insight. It is the one thing that makes progress possible or conceivable. Progress is not due to the achievements

of mind, but to the achievements of soul; all that mind can ever do is to register these achievements of soul. Behind, beneath, and above all that mankind has ever attempted or realised that is of permanent value to the race is this one principle of the supremacy of the cross. As ages pass on we are learning more fully, perhaps, how the individual may most effectually give himself to the universal life, but we are discovering nothing new as to the essential greatness of the giving itself.

Quintus Curtius leaping into the gulf that threatened to swallow up his beloved Rome, and the lifeboat man putting out to rescue a shipwrecked crew on the Goodwin Sands are manifestations of exactly the same impulse. And that in you, my agnostic fellow-citizen, which bids you hold your tongue about a business trouble for fear you should worry the wife, or pinch and starve yourself for the sake of your children, is only one more example of it. If ever you see a man take his stand and endure an evil for the sake of a principle or an impersonal ideal you see the same thing. Even when you are not noble enough to do it yourself, or when you think an individual mistaken as to the occasion which calls forth his self-devotion, you are still able to recognise the working of this same consciousness of a higher beyond which has the right to demand the fullest self-immolation and the most ungrudging homage on the part of the individual. You will actually see it in what appears to contradict it. You will see a woman so completely lost in the well-being of her lover that she would willingly die a thousand deaths for him herself, and yet she will

sacrifice other women's lovers to his interest without much compunction; she is driven by this same cosmic impulse, call it what you will, but she only sees it in one particular form of expression. It is what makes the warrior willing to die for his country, even while he strikes down other patriots who are dying for theirs. It produces martyrs on both sides during the vicissitudes of a great cause. The Roman Catholics who kindle the fires of Smithfield go willingly to the rack and the scaffold themselves under Elizabeth and James—always the same thing, the expression, maybe partial, or even, as we think, fanatical, but in every one of them there is this kernel of divinity, this homage to the cross. You all know it; there is not one of you who does not know it; and every man and woman among us bows in reverence before it as the very highest thing of which humanity has any experience.

Now will you please tell me what this is? Can you tell me why your heart is touched and thrilled by every splendid example of it that comes under your notice? If you want to fire the imagination and stir the pulses of your fellow-men, all you have to do is to show them some Christ on His Calvary in real life and the thing is done. The completer the oblation the more power it has to move us—provided we really see it for what it is. You may tell me you do not know what it is, but I am not talking like a fool when I say I think I know; it is the truth about the universe; it is that in man which reveals God. If this is not God then the world has never seen God, and yet has stumbled on something worthy of eternal homage. If you want to

find God, do not go to the school-men; you need not concern yourself greatly about what this particular preacher is saying to you this morning; but go out into the street and look for the first mother with a baby at her breast, or range yourself alongside the man who has lost his chance in life rather than stultify his conscience, and you have come upon Him. Better still, ask yourself what it is that rises up in sudden protest within you when you are tempted to do a mean or dirty action, and you will find that the scrub in your wilderness has flamed into unearthly splendour and you are gazing into the eyes of God.

But if you admit this much you will have to admit something more. You will have to say that if we are ever to see this divine splendour in its fulness we shall have sometime to forego external aids when our noblest choices are made and our greatest deeds are done. These ascents are the hardest to mount because we have to go alone without any support but that of God within, and even that voice may cease to speak with clearness at the darkest moment. Would not the full manifestation of the moral greatness of Socrates have been something short without that cup of hemlock? but he drank it alone. The garment of flame that wrapped the suffering body of Joan of Arc was a more fitting expression of the grandeur of her spirit than the patents of nobility which the King of France afterwards conferred upon her family. Poor Joan! She always seemed to hear heavenly voices urging her on while there was something to be done; but when it came to the last chapter, and she could do nothing

but suffer, they were silent and she was left without consolation. But the same was true of a greater than Joan of Arc. The cry from Calvary, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" was the cry of the supremest self-oblation that has ever been made in face of the silence of heaven. If it had never been made at all there would have been something in human experience which even Jesus did not know, and a reach of attainment He had never scaled. It seems a terrible thing to say, but somehow I feel glad that that prayer of anguish was ever prayed. Jesus cried, and heaven was silent, lest it should rob Him of His last and highest glory, the glory of having laid everything upon the altar of sacrifice without any consciousness of personal satisfaction or reward. For one awful half-hour, so to speak, heaven watched in silence, and then the soul of Jesus rose into the light in all the majesty of a divinity which knew no more of failure and death.

Will you not take this truth home to your own hearts? There must be many of you who need it. In the presence of this truth of life, this innermost of all good, do you not feel that all questions about the limits of human knowledge or differences in doctrine are best answered by being ignored? Is it not clear that all teachers of truth are trying to say the same thing, and that every noble life has succeeded in saying it? And does it not help you to know this? What can you possibly do with your life to-day that has not been done a thousand times before? What pathway can you tread that has not been trodden by all the sons of God in all the ages

past? And what meaning can there have been in the earthly experience of the greatest of saints and seers, or even of Jesus Himself, which is not in yours? You are sometimes tempted to think that no one has ever had to live just such a life, or face just such a situation, as yours at the present moment. That is quite a natural mistake to make; every man's career is unique and interesting to himself. But the truth is that your next-door neighbour probably knows as much of the great problem as you do. You are not in the least original. The external details of your career may be such as never took place before, but the use you are called upon to make of your being is precisely that of all the rest of your fellow-men. In everything that comes your way you can do one of two things—you can be Christ or Pilate. You can either be a coward or a hero, a liar or a messenger of truth, a weakling or the master of your fate, a robber of the race or its saviour. Whether at home, or out in the world, or in the secret of your own heart, you are always having to decide between the lesser and the larger self, the particular and the universal, the world and God. It will sometimes seem as though you are so utterly alone in the decision that there comes not one ray of help and comfort out of the unseen to brighten your lot. You may feel as if prayer were a mockery, and everything unreal except the hell of going on living. You may ask yourself whether the game is worth the candle, and why you should strive to preserve ideals and rise above baseness and foulness in your treatment of mankind. You may passionately protest that if you could change places

with God—supposing that there is a God—you would at least speak the one word that the pilgrim needs most when the night is darkest. Well, so you would; but you would speak it as God speaks it—within and not without the conquering soul. That still small voice does not speak its last and greatest word until all lesser sounds are hushed, and the soul has taken its bravest step alone and apparently unaided. That is the moment when angels hold their breath, as it were, to see if we are equal to the test. The voice of heaven is silent for half-an-hour, only half-an-hour, and then breaks the song of jubilee.

XVII

THE CRYSTAL SEA

"And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God."—REV. xv. 2.

IT is no easy matter to undertake to interpret the symbolism of the book of Revelation, for, to a great extent, it must necessarily be obscure to the modern mind. We are all more or less acquainted with efforts which have been made by imperfectly educated people to explain the prophecies of this strange book as having relation to events which have yet to take place in the history of the world. Some people seem to find a great fascination in this kind of exercise, not only with the book of Revelation, but with the various other books of the Bible, especially the book of Daniel. I can well remember when I was a child reading that the "little horn" of the book of Daniel was, I think, the Prince Imperial, according to the detailed explanation given by the editor of a certain religious periodical; and one was quite interested the other day to find that, now the poor Prince Imperial is dead, the little horn has become somebody else. I should not be greatly surprised to discover that

there are people present in the congregation this morning who have been instructed that the "Scarlet Woman" of Revelation is the Church of Rome. Whatever else it was it never was that. But the great majority of my hearers will know quite well that all this kind of theorising is beside the mark and out of place. The man who wrote this book of Revelation—or, rather, the man who put it together, for it is a composite work—was writing for a constituency which well understood the symbolism he employed; but we do not, except to a comparatively limited degree. This man was writing about his own times, not about ours. He had in mind the coming overthrow of the world-wide Roman Empire, and the establishment of something entirely new in its place. He never foresaw the Europe and America of to-day, and never dreamed that militarism, struggle, and suffering would last so long as they have done. He was looking for a grand dramatic wind-up of the existing order of things and the conquest of earth by the hosts of heaven. This, remember, was the writer's point of view, a point of view from which he never departs for a moment. All the symbolism he uses, and which was quite familiar to the people for whom he wrote, is meant to illustrate this point of view. Sometimes we know what the symbolism means and sometimes we do not. If we only knew the everyday conversation of the Jews of the Dispersion for whom this book was written it would contain no obscurities for us; but, unfortunately, we do not. We only know a part of it; and even the most eminent New Testament

scholars are obliged to confess, therefore, that some of the allusions in this book must for the present remain a mystery.

But I do not think this observation applies to the remarkable expression which we have chosen as our text this morning—"a sea of glass (or a glassy sea) mingled with fire." The figure is a striking one, and we are not without guidance as to its spiritual meaning. In a modified form the phrase appears first in the fourth chapter, wherein the writer describes himself as taken up in spirit into Heaven and gazing upon the throne of God. The imagery of this part of the book is mostly borrowed from that of Ezekiel, and is marvellously rich and suggestive, albeit restrained and reverent. The nearest approach he makes to a description of the Almighty Himself is to say: "Behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And He that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone." In Chapter xxi. we are twice told that the jasper stone was "clear as crystal." The sardine stone was fiery red. He then proceeds to tell us that before the throne there was "a glassy sea like unto crystal." He returns to this figure in our text, and tells us that this glassy sea which spread before the throne of God was shot with flame, and that around it stood a host of those who had come victorious out of the conflicts of earth, singing the song of Moses and the Lamb.

Now, here is ample material for a lengthy discussion of our theme if we were to enter upon it in all its details. But all I want is to show that this man was thinking of something great and good,

and that the language he uses is quite in accordance with his theme, although we should use different language now-a-days. You cannot fail to observe that he speaks of God as possessing the same attributes as the glassy sea which surrounds His throne. He speaks of the nature of God as crystal-clear and yet as filled with fire. I think I can see what he means. "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." But He is also love, the burning flame that is never quenched and in whose embrace all foulness and corruption are destroyed. The sea before the throne is the truth about God, and about all being, made manifest to those who are worthy to behold it with unclouded vision. The sea is the emblem of mystery in most of the apocalyptic writings. Here we are told that the mystery which surrounds the being of God is no longer mystery to those who are worthy to see Him as He is. It is infinite, but there is no part dark. It is crystal-clear with the light of truth, and mingled with the flame of eternal love that streams from the throne itself. *The glassy sea is thus a beautiful figure for the perfect revelation of the glory and the grace of God.*

Who, then, are these who stand upon the glassy sea and behold with unveiled face the beatific vision? The writer tells us that they were the people who had conquered the beast. By the beast I have no doubt he meant the infamous Nero, under whose orders one of the fiercest and cruellest persecutions of the Christians took place. You will not need to be reminded that at the time of which this chapter treats Nero had illuminated his palace

gardens on a festival occasion with the bodies of burning Christians, who had been covered with pitch before they were set on fire. This must have been a terrible time for the followers of Jesus, and would test their fidelity to the uttermost. We are here told that those who had come off victorious in this conflict with the worst that the world could do were privileged to behold the truth as it really is, and to gaze, as it were, upon the very face of Him who is eternal light and love. "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He that sitteth on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike upon them nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life; and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Here is the point at which I feel we can legitimately begin to think of this remarkable passage as applicable to ourselves. We may put the matter thus: The one great object of all spiritual aspiration and achievement is to stand before that crystal sea which is illumined with the fire of God. We may not always put it to ourselves this way, but this is what we want. We want to know; we want to see; we want to be at one with God; we want to worship in the radiant presence of the infinite ocean of love divine. I believe all men are more or less conscious of this longing, but there are some natures in whom it amounts to an all-absorbing passion. These are the material out of which

saints and mystics are made. There are human beings to whom life only seems to spell one word, and that word is God. They see everything in relation to God, and without God life would cease to have meaning. Thus John Henry Newman tells us that even when he was a child there were to him only two luminous self-evident realities over against each other, God and his own soul. The ordinary man does not feel like this, but there are times which come to all of us when we feel an indescribable yearning to break through the trammels which surround us, and understand life as it really is. In our best moments we all want to pierce the veil of mystery that hides from us the Great Beyond, and not only so, but to attain to that ineffable something which is neither near nor far, and to which we really belong. Have you never had this haunting call from the infinite? I am sure you have. You have had it when you did not know what you wanted, just like the little child who, when asked why she was crying, replied that it was because she wanted something she did not know the name of. We all want that same something to which we cannot give a name.

Like tides on a desert sea-beach
  When the moon is low and thin,
Into our hearts high yearnings
  Come welling and surging in;
Come from the mystic ocean,
  Whose rim no foot hath trod;
Some of us call it longing
  And others call it God.

It is almost useless to try to describe what I mean, for we all know and yet we don't know. We want

the life that is death—death to self-interest, self-pity, self-regard. We want to escape from the imprisonment of self into the region where the self becomes all and there is nothing beyond. We want to lose ourselves so completely in that one eternal life that there shall no longer be any question of me and thee. We want to reach the good beyond the good; the right within the right; the truth of which truth is but the shadow. We want to be lifted out of the tossing sea of human passion into the eternal calm where knowledge and achievement are one. We want that rest and blessedness in which the undertone of joy is sacrifice and sacrifice is liberty. We want—oh, how much we want! —to love without fear of losing, and to worship without ceasing that which is the living God reflected in our own being—our very existence being the homage we render to That which is the source and sustenance of all.

It is no use saying you do not want this. You do; we all do. It is what the greedy man wants when he goes out to gather gold; he does not want the gold, but that of which the gold is the symbol, the something for which his soul is craving and will not be denied, even though he is seeking it in a wrong way. It is what the bad man wants when he spreads havoc and ruin in the path of his ambition or his lust; he is looking for heaven in the vaults of hell. It is what is driving every one of you to hope and fear, to toil and rest, to lonely introspection and the joy of human fellowship and love. It is the pang in sorrow; the loss in grief; the lowest note in failure and the highest in suc-

cess. If you do not know this you do not know yourselves. You are so constituted that you can never stop seeking until you have found the eternal calm of the perfect vision of God. If you try to rest in anything less you will be spurred on again by your own soul and swept upward from height to height until you enter upon the Great Peace on the shores of the crystal sea.

But how can we attain this object? What is the nearest way home, so to speak? There is but one answer, and that has been given by every noble life that was ever lived since the world began. If we would attain to the life eternal we must be content to climb the steep and winding path that leads from the valley of the shadow of death to the everlasting heights of that perfect knowledge which is perfect love. We have to become what we seek. We shall never enter upon the realisation of any good which is external to ourselves. Knowing is being, and apart from being there is no knowing in the things of God. But being and knowing both imply doing. Every aspiration of the soul Godward implies a corresponding activity manward. Only those can stand before the glassy sea and enter upon the beatific vision who have come off victorious in the conflict with the beast, and that means waging war with all that is foul and degrading in the experience of humanity as a whole. In one of Olive Schreiner's beautiful mystical sketches in the little book called *Dreams* there is a vivid figurative description of the vision granted to an aspirant who had come to the borderland of heaven, and saw before him a gigantic

divine figure, the ideal humanity, which was neither male nor female, but the express image or reflection of God Himself. In response to the prayer of the aspirant to be permitted to stay there and gaze upon this ideal spiritual fulfilment of all the hopes and struggles of earth, God's answer was to point down to the world he had left, the world of blindness, mourning, and woe. "All you seek is there," He said. And so indeed it is. There is no kind of spiritual aspiration which has not its equivalent in holy desire to free humanity from its burdens and destroy the sense of separateness which is the root cause of cruelty and wrong. No man shall ever behold the glassy sea who does not from that altitude realise all mankind as his very self. The measure of his upward rise is just the measure of his downward plunge to the rescue of imprisoned souls. The clearer his vision of the crystal sea, the brighter glows the fire in the midst of it. There is no truth that is not love.

Have you never felt that you would give all you possess just to know what is behind the veil and what this bewildering life of ours really means? I am sure you have. And there are times when the silence seems almost intolerable. It humbles our pride to think that with all our boasted advance in civilisation and power over nature we know no more about what lies on the other side of death than men knew 6,000 years ago. There are many who profess to have received authentic communications from their departed friends, but if so the testimony that filters through in this way is so vague and uncertain, as well as inconsistent, that it cannot command general acceptance.

Strange, is it not, that of the myriads who
Before us passed the door of darkness through,
Not one returns to tell us of the road
Which, to discover, we must travel too?

No, if we have to rely on this kind of external evidence the universe must remain as great a mystery as ever. But there is one kind of evidence concerning which the highest witness never changes. It is that the way to blessedness is the path of self-renunciation. Let a man determine so to live that his life is one long denial of the lower, one long affirmation of the higher, and in the end he comes to know that there is neither death nor separation, and no life but the knowledge of God. The change from one body to another is a small thing; the ascent from the brute to the god is always by the same pathway, the pathway of self-giving in the service of the common life. "No new commandment write I unto you, but an old commandment which ye heard from the beginning." Life is one and indivisible. Act as if it were so, and as though your individuality had no meaning apart from the whole, and you will come to see that this is the truth, the truth which is love —"a sea of glass mingled with fire" spreading around the throne of God.

So when the heart cries out for God, go and staunch the bleeding wounds of man. When you see a human being wretched and degraded, say to yourself: "There am I." When you hear the cry of want and misery breaking from the hearts of the children of despair, recognise the cry of your own soul. When your own heart is aching for sympathy and understanding, when you feel your lone-

liness the most, pour forth the balm of divine healing to another's need and you shall find that it has satisfied your own. When you are tempted to think of your own good as apart from that of your fellow, or to snatch at a gain that means his loss, remember that you are being deceived by the lie of the serpent in Eden, the lie that there can be any good which cleaves a gulf between man and man, or man and God. When you find yourself indifferent to the call of the right against the wrong, or the cause of the weak against the strong, lift up your eyes to the throne in the midst of which is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Understand that that throne is here now; here is infinity; here is eternity, waiting for you to enter upon your heritage. When you see men in danger of forgetting who and what they are, the offspring of the Most High, take care to remember it for them by living it yourself in their presence. Suffer no deed of hate to pass unchecked the portals of your being. Let no lie pollute your soul. However strong may seem the earthly and devilish forces in humanity as you know it, be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good. Tell despondency it bears the mark of the beast and that you refuse to wear it. Say the same to moral cowardice and cupidity. Never be content merely with repelling the attacks of evil upon the fragile good you keep locked up within your own heart and conscience; out upon the enemy. Become the assailant, and drive him from his fastnesses in human hearts and lives. It is never safe for a child of God to be content with maintaining his footing,

or standing siege in the war between heaven and hell; he must hurl himself with divine courage and faith upon the ranks of evil, and break and destroy them in the name of the Lord. There is no human need that is not yours, and no spiritual achievement in which you have not an immediate concern. To follow Jesus to the highest of all; to be privileged to gaze upon that infinite crystal sea, the manifested light and love of God, you will have to take upon yourself the whole burden of the sins and suffering of mankind, for they are your very own. You cannot avoid them without choosing the outer darkness; you cannot assume them without rising into the eternal light. This is daring language, but my text justifies it. "A sea of glass mingled with fire!" Oh, eternal calm, far, far above our feeble range of sight, yet deep within our souls even now! When shall we behold that glorious expanse in which all being is included and fulfilled? When? Only when we ourselves become the perfectly manifested light and love of God, and eternally at one with Him and with all that is made in His image and likeness. This alone is real; all else is but seeming. There is nothing beyond the crystal sea.

XVIII

THE HOLY CITY AND ITS TEMPLE

"*And I saw no temple therein; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.*"—REV. xxi. 22.

WE have so frequently discussed together the symbolism of the book of Revelation that there will be no need to remind you that every sentence in this marvellous chapter has a figurative significance and stands for some spiritual reality. Still, it is possible there may be some here who have not yet grasped the basal idea upon which the writer raises this beautiful structure of thought and feeling. You are all familiar with the opening sentences: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away, and there was no more sea. And I saw the Holy City, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." All the rest of the chapter is a description of this glorious city in which God is to dwell with His people, and there is to be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor any more pain. But what does the writer mean by this city? Where is it to be, and who will inherit it? I dare say there may be some of you who think of it as heaven, the heaven to which we hope to go when we die. We sing

hymns about it in which this view is taken for granted, and the very imagery of this chapter is employed to illustrate the theme. In that section of the Congregational hymn-book headed, "The final glory of heaven," there are quite a number of beautiful hymns in which this belief is asserted. Thus:

Jerusalem, my happy home,
Name ever dear to me;
When shall my labours have an end
In joy and peace in thee?

When shall these eyes thy heaven-built walls
And pearly gates behold,
Thy bulwarks with salvation strong,
And streets of shining gold?

Here, you see, is the very language of the twenty-first chapter of Revelation; and it fully accords with many of our most familiar conceptions. The New Jerusalem is for most of us the glorious home which waits for us beyond the river of death.

But the moment we begin to look into the subject we see that this could not be precisely what the writer of this chapter was thinking about. He says he saw this city coming down out of heaven. Evidently then it was not heaven; so the walls of jasper and the golden streets must have some other significance. On the other hand, he says there is to be no more death, and he goes on to declare that there will be no need of the sun to shine in the glorious city, and that there will be no night there. What in the world is he talking about? This city is quite unlike anything we have ever heard or read about on the face of the earth. No death, so sun, no moon! If this city is not heaven, neither is it

earth, for its establishment seems to imply a complete transformation of the world as we know it now.

Well, that is just the explanation. According to this writer everything *is* going to be transformed. He speaks of a new heaven and a new earth. At present heaven and earth are quite separate states of existence, but in the new city of God of which this man dreams they are no longer to be two but one. I could quite understand it if some of you were to say that you have no patience to listen to such ravings; but they are not so absurd as they appear to be. Let us try to understand before we criticise. To tell you the truth, I have a good deal of sympathy with this unknown writer's view of things. I believe that the veil between seen and unseen is a very flimsy one, and that this seemingly solid matter which forms our prison-house is not so very solid after all. Probably it is nothing more than our own thought exercised upon a very limited plane. It is quite conceivable that we might wake up, as it were, from a sleep, and realise that there never has been a material *and* a spiritual, but that we have all the time been living at the very centre of reality, only we did not know it. This is what the writer is suggesting anyhow. He thinks if men were only good enough, and ready for the change, the veil between heaven and earth would be taken away, and the two would be seen to be one. That is what he means by the city coming down; it is heaven taking possession of earth and absorbing it into itself. In painting this picture he goes a good deal farther than most of his contemporaries were capable of doing. Patriotic Jews had long been looking for the city of

God on earth, but they meant their own beloved Jerusalem, the very Jerusalem which Cook's personally conducted tours give so many of us the opportunity of visiting at the present day. From the reports which travellers bring back it must be confessed that that squalid-looking mud village is anything but a model for the city of God so gorgeously portrayed in this chapter. But its condition was even worse at the moment when this chapter was written. It had just been destroyed by the Romans, and lay a smoking ruin. The Temple of which the Jews had been so proud, with its marble walls and golden domes, had been given to the flames, and all the sacred vessels carried off by the Roman army.

It is difficult for us to realise now what a terrible blow this must have been to Jewish national hopes. For generations they had been looking forward to the coming of an ideal social order, the kingdom of God, in which their Jerusalem should be the capital of the whole earth, and their Temple the centre of the world's worship. Their city was to be at once the political and the spiritual focus of all the interests of mankind. They seem to have believed this with all their hearts, and to have gone on expecting to see it realised as an actual fact. Take, for example, the following from Isaiah lx.—

"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. . . . Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought. . . . The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all

they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee the city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel. . . . The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee; but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory."

It is plain to be seen that this was intended as foretelling great prosperity for Jerusalem, a kind of universal dominion. The reference to the sun and moon is a figure for the material splendour which is to be hers in the day of her triumph over all the nations of the earth.

If now you turn to the book of Ezekiel you will find an even more elaborate description of the city of God, including a colossal Temple. Here we have the original of some of the language used in this chapter about the gates and the walls. Ezekiel really means the Temple at Jerusalem which was then waiting to be rebuilt, but his references to the water of life which proceeds out of that Temple show that he thought of it as a centre of blessing for the whole world. He could not think of Jerusalem without the Temple, and he could not think of the Temple without believing that it would be the shrine of a universal religion in which all nations should worship Israel's God. This vision of his seems all the grander when we remember that he elaborated it at a time when he himself was a prisoner in a strange land, and that all the Jewish people were the subjects of mighty Babylon. That was six centuries before Christ was born. What had happened in the mean time? The Jews were back in

their own land, but they were still subject to a foreign power. King Herod had built them a more magnificent Temple than had ever stood on Zion's hill before. How they loved to read the words of Ezekiel and the second Isaiah about the all-dominating place which their city and their Temple would come to occupy amidst the kingdoms of the world! I am afraid they mostly lost sight of the spiritual ideal in their anxiety for the fulfilment of the material. Then the crash came. The soldiers of the Emperor Titus destroyed both city and Temple, and they have never been rebuilt. That ancient dream was at an end; the Jewish people had no longer a home; henceforth they were wanderers on the face of the earth. To-day one of the most pathetic sights in the world is the Jews' wailing place, as it is called, where, behind the gigantic stones which once formed a corner of their old Temple buildings, pilgrim Jews stand to weep and lament over the destruction of their ancient kingdom, and the shattering of all their hopes. With Jerusalem in ruins and in the hands of the foreigner, with a Mohammedan mosque standing on the site of the Temple itself, what has become of the dream of a city of God?

Here is where the grandeur of this vision of the writer of Revelation comes in. He sees that even if the earthly Jerusalem cannot rise again, its heavenly counterpart can come down. If there is to be no material splendour there can be a spiritual victory and a reign of truth. This will have no more to do with the Jews than with any other people. He actually takes up the language of Isaiah and Ezekiel and gives it a universal and wholly

spiritual significance. The world is to be won for God; there is to be an ideal human society on earth; in the end earth will become heaven. He believed, like all the early Christians, that death would be abolished with the passing of sin and sorrow. When he used the language of Isaiah about the city needing no light of the sun he meant it in an even grander way. Henceforth God in Christ was to be the light of every man's life, all the nations were to walk in that light, and love and brotherhood be all in all. But he makes a bold stroke at this point by departing from Ezekiel's dream of the Jewish Temple. He says that God Himself will be the Temple, and men shall worship Him in spirit and in truth. Looking back, as it were, upon the desecration and destruction which had fallen upon the Temple that was formerly the pride and glory of Israel, he says in effect: Well, let it go. At the best it was only a beautiful symbol for a still more beautiful reality. Nothing is lost by the ruin of that which was built with hands. God Himself is our Temple—God in Christ. We need no other. The whole earth is full of His glory, and in Him we live and move and have our being. This is the real significance of this passage. It is a reassuring reference to Ezekiel's elaborate vision of the place which the Temple was to fill in the reverence of mankind. It was written to comfort and inspire those who felt that the loss of the Temple meant the loss of everything great and good. Not so, he declared. The loss of the Temple is no more the loss of religion than the death of the body is the end of the man. On the contrary, by destroying the outward it throws

us back upon the inward; it removes the local and temporary to fix our gaze upon the universal and eternal. This was a wonderful and inspiring conception, and must have done a great deal in that time of new beginnings and fierce persecutions to lift men's thoughts above the merely material and mundane. The further we get back into Christian history the more we realise how intense was the expectation of the primitive Church that Christ would speedily establish His kingdom upon earth, and that all evil would be at an end. But you know also that as time went on their thoughts on this subject began to change. Christ did not come on the clouds of heaven; evil was not cast out; death went on claiming his victims; sorrow and broken hearts were still to be found in abundance. Then came the break-up of the Roman Empire, and the beginnings of a new order. The Christian Church was the cradle of this new order, and became the most powerful organisation on earth. The new Europe began to look on the Church much as the old Jews had looked on the Temple. This was the City of God; this was the ark of salvation; this was the guarantee of deliverance from wrath in a world to come; this was the very body of Christ, and all its officers—from the Pope down to the humblest priest —were his appointed representatives. For a thousand years this theory went almost unquestioned. Proud, strong, and imposing was the mighty fabric of the Church. It was all that the old Jewish hierarchy had been and vastly more; it ruled the world, and claimed jurisdiction over men's bodies and souls. It is hard for us now to realise that such

pretensions ever existed or could be enforced over nations as well as individuals, but so it was; Pope Pius the Tenth has but a poor status in the world compared with that of his great predecessor Hildebrand, who could dare to keep the mightiest monarch in Christendom standing for four days, bare-footed in the snow with a rope round his neck, awaiting the sentence of the Vicar of Christ. If you care to go back into the literature of this period you will find that the language of this twenty-first chapter of Revelation, as well as that of Isaiah and Ezekiel, was pressed into the service of this seemingly invincible Church of Rome. Here was the City of God. What else could men want?

But the hour came when this too was challenged, and the blow struck at the Reformation is reverberating still. Luther did not see all he was doing when he voiced the rising consciousness of the Europe that Rome had lifted out of Barbarism; probably he would have shrunk from the task if he had. He was really sounding the death-knell of Church authority in any and every form. Protestantism was no substitute for Catholicism; as an ecclesiastical system neither has any more promise of permanence than the other. By a slow but inevitable process men are turning away from the Church as such towards a new and higher realisation of the City of God. I believe the day is coming rapidly when the Church *as we have hitherto known it*, whether Protestant or Catholic, will have ceased to be. Many people see this, and some of them tremble for the future, as thoughtful men were trembling at the time my text was written. If the Church

is to go what is to take its place? Is everything to be materialised? Will there be no place for the heavenly vision, no harbour of refuge for souls weary of the struggle and anguish of life? Can we spare the Church? Can we dispense with the holy fellowship of man with man on a plane higher than that of ordinary earthly existence and ordinary human interest? If not, where are we to find it, if the Church is to be no more?

These are questions which are agitating many minds at the present time. Some are utterly blind to the necessity for asking them at all, many are indifferent. But to the serious-minded who are despondent regarding the decline, the inevitable decline, of Church influence and organisation, I can only say: Fear not. God has never yet destroyed but to build bigger. I think I can see what is coming. We are witnessing the emergence of a Christianised social organism from the chaos and materialism of the past. The hour is at hand when we shall no longer speak of the Church and the world over against each other, the one sacred and the other profane; we shall come to see that human society is itself the sacred thing, and that our work is to fill it fuller and ever fuller of God. We shall have no need to mourn the disappearance of the Church; its pretensions are unreal even now. Even now the life of the Church is no higher and no happier than that of the world. The average member of the Church is no nobler and no truer as a friend and helper than those who make no religious profession whatever. When I say this I am very far from wishing to disparage the moral sincerity

of the representatives and adherents of organised Christianity; I am only pointing out a fact. In one sense that fact is a sign of the victory of Christ. Time was when the moral standard of pagan civilisation was far below that of the Christian society which lived in its midst; to-day it is otherwise, and it is not unfair to say that the principal part of that difference is due to the slow working of the leaven of the Christian evangel. We are still far, far behind what we ought to be, but it is at least an enormous gain that the modern world has come to see that the moral standard of Jesus was the right one and to honour it accordingly. No doubt there is much confusion of thought and difference of opinion as to what that standard really is in detail, but there is practically no difference of opinion as to what it is in spirit. We have come to accept the idea of brotherhood, compassion, the duty of caring for the weak, the necessity for co-operation in order to make life rich and full. We can imagine no higher standard for the individual than that of developing his powers to the uttermost in order to make them as great a gift as possible to the service of society. Even when a man is playing for his own hand he has to pretend that his object is to serve the communal well-being. Almost insensibly we have come to recognise that the service of all should be the consistent aim and endeavour of every individual. This is nothing new, even in Christianity, but the spirit which informs it is, or should be, the spirit of love. No one disputes this now. We are coming to expect from every man the fullest devotion to this principle, and we measure every man's

worth by his response to the demand. In this respect the Church goes no further than the world. We have ceased to dispute about the ideal itself; what we dispute about now is the way in which the ideal is being realised or avoided, and the Church has no monopoly of the earnestness and enthusiasm with which the subject is being debated in every rank of life. Is not this plain to be seen? When the Dreyfus scandal was brought to light who was the indomitable friend of the oppressed who insisted that justice should be done, and dared all risks in order to arouse public opinion on the question? Not a Christian preacher, but the anti-clerical novelist, Emile Zola. The Church, officially speaking, was against him in the matter, and seemed to love darkness rather than light. If you care to read down the roll of present-day benefactors of the human race you will see this kind of thing exemplified over and over again. It cannot honestly be said that the Church as such, whether Catholic or Protestant, is any more prominent in the advocacy of truth and right than is any other part of the community.

We are now upon the eve of still further developments in the practical application of the ideal of Jesus to the needs of mankind. The social consciousness is awakening as it never has done before, either in Christendom or in the greatest years of pagan Greece and Rome. We have now a sense of social sin such as even the Puritans never had and never dreamed of. We see the maladjustments of our industrial organisation, and we are seeking to remedy them. Here again we are all agreed. There

is no need to convince any one of the necessity for ameliorative action and the moral obligation to undertake it; what we do not agree upon is the direction in which we ought to proceed. And here is a significant thing: The division of opinion inside the Church is just as pronounced, and parties are divided in exactly the same way, as outside the Church. You will find that the man with something to lose by any drastic economic changes, even if he be a pillar in the Christian society and a generous giver to its funds, will usually resist the proposals of the more earnest social reformers. He will tell you that he does so because he is afraid it will be bad for society; what he really means is that it will be less comfortable for himself, but perhaps he does not realise that. On the other hand, there are many earnest spirits in the pews and pulpits of our churches who feel the present situation to be intolerable and are joining hands with avowed atheists and agnostics in the endeavour to replace it by something better. Is it too much to say that they are morally more closely akin to the latter than they are to the former? You will find this cross division running through all ranks and classes, and upsetting all our preconceived notions of what is right and desirable. Take the rich man. Sometimes he is a Christian who endows missions; sometimes he is an unscrupulous financier who piles up a fortune by squeezing the last drop of blood out of his fellows; sometimes he is a Christian philanthropist or socialist; sometimes he is these without being professedly a Christian. Now watch what happens. You will find the rich Christian and the rich man of

the world arrayed on the side of individualism against the rich Christian and the rich man of the world arrayed on the side of social regeneration. While the struggle is proceeding it will be impossible for you to say which is the Christian by any external marks whatsoever; the cleavage takes place on moral grounds which altogether ignore ecclesiastical considerations. It goes without saying that when you reach the workers the same thing holds equally good, except that the majority of the workers have a keener perception of the urgency of the practical issue. But the division of opinion is moral, not ecclesiastical; they would smile at you if you were to tell them that it is a question of the Church against the world. They know it is nothing of the sort, although the moral passion which is being put into it is as great as anything that was ever shown by Christian saints and martyrs in the heroic ages of the religion of Jesus.

So now you see where we are. It is no use trying to ignore the inevitable drift of things. We are facing a new synthesis. Something greater than the Church is rising into view, and the thoughts of men are receiving a new focus. What we are witnessing is the building of the City of God, a regenerated human society which needs no Temple, because there is no part of it in which God is not. The new world that is coming is just as sacred, and just as full of the divine life, as the Church has always claimed to be but never was. The great thing we have now to do is to get men to believe this and act upon it. We have to create the same feeling for human society as a whole that Christians used to

have for the ark of God, the holy Jerusalem, as they called the Church. We want them to love it with all the concentrated energies of mind and heart. We want them to learn to see Christ in it, and to enthrone Him in every part of it. We want to imbue them with reverence for human nature just as it is, and to inspire them with a glowing hope and confidence as to what it may become. We want to see the world of toil transformed by the light of heaven. We want to get all the children of the Most High to believe that the truest worship of God is the service of their kind; we want to expel the foolish and unworthy notion that any man is so bad that he can be excluded from divine favour, and shut outside the privileges of the rest. We want to drive home to every conscience the thought of individual responsibility for the common good and the common ill. We want to get rid of the delusion that society has no duties towards the morally diseased; we want to insist that social and individual regeneration imply each other. We must urge in season and out of season that the one thing that needs to be done in human relations is to reveal God. We shall glorify God in our politics, and we shall learn to say so openly and gladly. We shall have done with the wicked assumption that statesmen must necessarily be liars and thieves, and that the nations they represent must act like birds of prey swooping down upon the unfortunate and the defenceless to grab and devour. We shall banish cynicism from our international concerns, and therefore we shall have to grow a new race of leaders of the people who will not stand idly by while a whole population is being

enslaved and tortured in order to supply dividends for a shameless ring of financiers who never see their victims and care about nothing but lust and gold. The time is not so far distant when we shall say that to tolerate the existence of private monoply in the necessaries of life, or to give to any one man the power to exploit his fellows for his own advantage, is a sin against God in which the whole community is implicated. All this will come about just as soon as we can arouse in the public mind the same passionate devotion to the welfare of society that Christians once felt for the Church. We must compel men to think of it as holy unto the Lord, the living Temple on whose altars His light is ever burning, and His being is ever offered as the bread of life for His children.

And this can be done; it is the one thing that ought to be set before the young men of this generation, men who feel within themselves the stirring of great emotions, and know not how to interpret them. The Church must no longer claim your allegiance except as a means to an end, and that end the service of a far more sacred thing, the city whose Temple is the living God. After all, the Church is no more than a voluntary association for the attainment of a certain object. She forfeits her right to exist the moment she loses sight of that object. Her outward unity was shattered long ago, and a good thing too; God shattered it in order to prepare the way for the higher unity of human brotherhood. But I wish—oh, how earnestly I wish—all members of all Churches and of no Church could come to think of human society as Christians once thought of the

Church universal and undivided. I never go into a Catholic church without catching something of the spirit of that older day. In the silence of the kneeling worshippers; in the sacred lamps that burn before the high altar; in the pictures that adorn the walls, showing the stages of the Cross on which the life of Christ was sacrificed that He might draw all men unto Himself, I see a symbol of the vaster unity that is yet to be achieved. There is a solemn stillness, a suggestion of heaven and of unseen helpers, in that earthly temple made with hands. It is impossible for any man with reverence in his soul to stand in that silence without feeling that it is the speech of God. Cannot we come to feel the same about the common life of humanity? Cannot we worship God there, knowing what we are doing, and rejoicing to do it? Cannot we say as we enter the working-man's home, Here is one shrine in the glorious Temple of our God; we have to make this beautiful in reverent acknowledgment of the divine presence. Nothing is too good for the God who deigns to dwell here, and nothing should be withheld that can make the place of His feet glorious. Here is the sacred trinity—father, mother, and child. Here is the mystic union of the one with the many; here is the heaven that is to be. Then, when we go out into the busy world, and hear the voice of the multitudes in our great cities, like the sound of many waters; or watch the progress of human thought and achievement—the beauty of the heart conjoined to the magic of the hand; when nation calls to nation to bring their glory and honour into the City of God—shall we not say that

the Temple of the King of Heaven has vaster proportions than we knew, and that we love its every stone? As Walt Whitman has it in a poem which consists of a single verse—

I dream'd in a dream I saw a city invincible to the attacks of the whole of the rest of the earth,
I dream'd that was the new city of Friends,
Nothing was greater there than the quality of robust love, it led the rest,
It was seen every hour in the actions of the men of that city,
And in all their looks and words.

It is the holy city, New Jerusalem, and the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the Temple of it.

We are builders of that City,
All our joys and all our groans,
Help to rear its shining ramparts,
All our lives are building stones;
But the work that we have builded,
Oft with bleeding hands and tears,
And in error and in anguish,
Will not perish with our years.

It will be at last made perfect
In the universal plan;
It will help to crown the labours
Of the toiling hosts of man;
It will last and shine transfigured
In the final reign of right;
It will merge into the splendours
Of the City of the Light.

XIX

THE LAMB'S BOOK OF LIFE

"*They which are written in the Lamb's book of life.*"
—REV. xxi. 27.

FROM our infancy we have all been accustomed to hear about the Lamb's Book of Life, but how many of us know where the idea came from, and exactly what it stands for? Is it not possible that some of us have an inadequate and even a perverted notion as to the proper interpretation of the metaphor? I feel that there is some danger of belittling a grand and inspiring subject by ignoring the original conditions out of which it sprang. I am going to try this morning to show you as briefly as I can what those conditions were. Then let us see whether our use of this scriptural language is worthy of the theme. After that let us reapply its message to our own souls.

Like many of the sweetest passages in the New Testament, the inspiration of this one is derived from the Old. References to the Book of Life are to be found in various parts of the Jewish scriptures, especially after the exile. Those who returned from the Babylonian captivity were enrolled by families in a great book kept for that purpose. The names in this roll were supposed to constitute

the new Israel, the nation which was henceforth a religious community, a church and a kingdom in one. To this nation was committed the task of rebuilding the sacred city of Jerusalem, and re-instituting the ancient worship of God on Mount Zion. Babylon, with its heathenism and oppression, had been left behind; the kingdom of liberty and holiness lay before. God had wrought a mighty deliverance for His people. In order to realise the jubilation with which this event was hailed you must imagine yourself to be one of the long procession of Jewish exiles making their way back across the Syrian desert to the little spot they called home. For many weary years they had been afflicted in the cruel city of the plains; they were now free to go back to the land of their fathers and their holy city, Jerusalem. "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

But, when they got home, these people were disgusted by the paganism and poor moral quality of their kinsmen whom they found already there. This was the reason why they were so particular about the book of names. They refused to worship with or include in their fellowship those who had intermixed with foreign nations, and degraded the service of God by heathen rites. They therefore became very strict about the qualifications for citizenship in the new Jerusalem which they had now to build. Only those whose names were on the roll as being qualified by character, training,

and descent for membership in the new kingdom were admitted to the altar, or allowed to dwell within the walls. How far these rigorous regulations were actually enforced we do not know, but while the enthusiasm of the restoration lasted, they were no doubt observed to a considerable degree. As time wore on, however, they were relaxed; the level of moral earnestness declined; there was much disappointment among those who had hoped for great things. Never again was Israel what she had been in her ancient days of independence.

But this ideal of a City of God and a Book of Life was never forgotten, and, as you see, it supplied a good deal of the imagery of primitive Christianity, particularly of the Book of Revelation. Henceforth Babylon became a synonym for the Roman Empire, and the Book of Life a metaphor to signify those who were included in the Church of Jesus. Now here is a rather difficult thing for us to grasp. There is no room for doubt that these first Christians really thought of the earthly Jerusalem as still somehow to be the centre of a regenerated world, but as time went on the ideal was transferred from earth to heaven. When we speak of the New Jerusalem we generally mean heaven, but this was not so at first. Apparently —strange as it may seem—primitive Christianity believed in a state of existence which could be both earth and heaven. This is what to us seems so puzzling. We cannot imagine heaven and earth becoming one, but they could and did. Thus the writer of the chapter which contains our text says: "I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming

down from God out of heaven." A close examination of all that follows shows clearly that in his view heaven and earth now became merged into each other, and there was no longer to be any talk of a material and a spiritual, a hither and a yonder. To describe his vision he finds himself compelled to use the old familiar language about the Holy City and the Book of Life. We have seen where he got it, but we see also that he idealises it. The Book of Life is no longer the roll of those who came back from Babylon and were found worthy of citizenship in the reconstituted kingdom of Judah; it is the number of those who belong to Jesus in earth and heaven.

It meant something, too, far beyond what the ordinary Christian nowadays ever dreams of. Those who were written in the Lamb's Book of Life were supposed to be written there not merely because they gave a formal allegiance to the name of Jesus, but because they were fighting the battle for righteousness with all their might. This was a time of fierce persecution, when men and women, and even little children, were shedding their blood for Jesus every day. It was a terrible time, and upon the fidelity of these suffering ones depended the whole future of the world. An old civilisation was dying and a new one was struggling to the birth. It seems a curious thing to us to read that these Christian martyrs were accused of atheism and immorality, but so it was. The fact was that they stood for a purer religion and a higher morality than that from which men's thoughts were now turning away. Now that the dust of battle

has settled we can see clearly that the Christian ideal of losing the life to find it was one which was fundamentally opposed to the decaying faiths around it. But it was too high for speedy imitation. The world laughed at the ancient gods of Rome, and scorned the superstitions and degrading rites with which some of them were worshipped, but it was not prepared for the social upheaval which would follow upon the whole-hearted acceptance of Christian principles. Then, as now, vested interests were strong enough to hold their own against an evangel, and even to repudiate it in the name of something higher. So there was nothing for it but that those who believed in the ideal of Jesus should witness for it by being willing to suffer and die in its service. They did so, with what result you now know. The message of my text is that those who thus died had not really died any more than their Master. Their names were written in His Book of Life. They not only lived in the world unseen, but in the triumph of truth and righteousness in human society as a whole.

Now what do we think about the Lamb's Book of Life to-day? (The ancient symbols are losing some of their power, partly because people do not understand them, but I am sure they would love and reverence them again if they could only realise what they originally meant.) Well, I will tell you what it is not. It is not a list of those whom God has agreed to admit to heaven because they firmly believe that some one else has done all that was necessary to get them there. It is God's roll of honour. It is the glorious company of those who have suffered for Christ. It includes all whose

lives have been willingly and cheerfully offered on the altar of love. The very phrase "the Lamb's Book of Life" is a declaration of this, and distinguishes it from every other list of names that was ever written.

Those whose names are in the Book of Life are life-givers. They are the servants of Jesus, working in the spirit of Jesus to minister more abundant life to the world. They are believers, it is true; for no work worth doing has ever yet been done apart from the dynamic of faith. But they are not merely believers in the conventional sense; they are living sacrifices, filling up the measure that is behind of the sufferings of Christ in the service of man. When we speak of the Lamb's Book of Life we must never forget this. It is not merely the roll of those who have escaped something; it is the designation of those who have achieved something. No mere pious acceptance of the redeeming work of Christ; no comfortable acquiescence in the belief that He has given everything, and you have only to take, will qualify you for a place in the Book of Life. The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world is still being slain on the altar of human hearts, and wherever that divine sacrifice is offered new power and hope stream into this dark and sorrowful world. Alas, we have almost taken the soul out of this grand conception by the unreal way in which we too commonly regard it now. At the time my text was written men and women were dying for it, and the thing they most needed to hear was that their anguish meant greater glory for their Lord and His ultimate triumph over all the wickedness and all the pain wherewith the souls

of men were being afflicted. There was nothing of which they needed so much to be assured as that the work they were doing was not in vain, and that that which was given unto death would presently arise in glorious eternal life. They may or may not have thought of the wicked as doomed to everlasting woe, but that idea finds no place in my text; the stress is placed elsewhere. The one grand, all-dominating principle of it is that those who are crucified with Christ are sharers in His triumph and partakers of His life. Dying to self they live to God; perishing in the conflict with that which is base and foul they find that the seeming death is no death, but the gateway into that higher life which is eternal love and joy.

Some of you may be feeling at this point that you are missing something to which you have been accustomed, and which you greatly value. You may be feeling that this explanation of the Lamb's Book of Life is not so sweet and beautiful as the one upon which you have been taught to dwell, and which has been such a help to you in your religious life. You may be saying to yourself: "I do not like this. I want to owe everything to Jesus. Hitherto I have always thought that my name was written in the Lamb's Book of Life because the Atonement of my blessed Redeemer had won for me a place in the blood-washed throng before the throne of God in heaven. I have thought of Jesus as doing that work alone, without any help, and of myself as His humble beneficiary. I do not want to think anything else, nor can I readily believe that my place in that Book of Life has anything to do with my merit or my struggle,

or my self-sacrifice, or anything else but the love of Jesus."

Well, I will grant that to all outward seeming there is a great difference between this belief of yours and what I have just been telling you. Perhaps it is not so great as appears, but I shall not attempt to deny it or explain it away. I put it to you—which is the nobler and higher? Which, judging by the circumstances in which this great saying was born, is the nearer to what the first followers of Jesus felt about it? Far be it from me to lessen the worth of Jesus in your regard or even to seem to detract from the value of His atoning life and death. But there is something here that you and I have got to face. We have got to see that the Atonement of Jesus is no use unless it makes us like Jesus. It has got to be repeated in us. As Paul has it, we have to become willing to be delivered unto death for Jesus' sake that the life of Jesus may become manifest in us. There is no salvation which is not this, and the gratitude and reverence that we really owe to Jesus are gratitude and reverence for having made this possible. I put it to you again: which is worthier of Jesus, to believe that He has got us into heaven without any effort of our own—a heaven from which others are shut out—or to rejoice that He has shown us wherein true life consists? I do not care three straws whether I go to heaven or not—using the word for the moment in its conventional sense. But I do rejoice and thank God for that great Master and Redeemer of mankind who has shown me at an unspeakable cost what it is to live the life of love. I wish I could live it, but I am frail

and earthly, whereas He was divinely strong, and the light of God shone in all He said and did. And yet, no sooner have I realised this than my heart rises in loving gratitude to Him once more for the assurance that human weakness and imperfection can and shall be transformed into divine strength and holiness by the power of the indwelling Spirit of God. To have shown us God in humanity is to have shown us God in *all* humanity. To have shown us that humanity invincible once, is to have shown us that it shall be invincible again and yet again until divine love has no more earthly victories to win.

O wisest love! that flesh and blood,
Which did in Adam fail,
Should strive afresh against the foe,
Should strive and should prevail;

And that a higher gift than grace
Should flesh and blood refine,
God's presence, and His very self,
And essence all-divine!

But, dear fellow-Christians, all of you who really love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth, and do not merely make a lip-profession of it—I am well aware that your names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life in the sense that my text really means. Your real creed is often much deeper and truer than your formal one. If you love Jesus you love what Jesus stood for, and your love shows itself in the laying down of your life in His service that you may take it again in the greater good and larger life of all mankind. You cannot be selfish and mean if you belong to Him; you can no longer hesitate about what to do with

the opportunity that God has given you; you cannot shrink from the cross when the cause of truth requires it. You cannot think first and foremost of your own salvation; as the love of God is shed abroad in your heart you get beyond all that, and seek only to deliver the world from the bondage of all that makes it dark and sad. I say I know this, and you know it too. It is the grand, unifying, spiritual experience which underlies all differences in doctrine and reveals itself in all who are of the fellowship of Christ.

I do not hesitate, therefore, to appeal to all sincere and earnest souls in this congregation this morning in the same spirit as the writer of my text. I do not care what church you belong to or whether you belong to none. I do not care whether your theology is broad or narrow, old or new. The gospel I am preaching to you this morning is the gospel of a great *demand*, and I believe from my heart that you will respond to it just because it is that. I do not offer you—I dare not offer you—a salvation that will cost you nothing. The salvation that is spoken of here will cost you everything that you have to give. To have your name written in the Lamb's Book of Life is no mere form of words; it is a call to death—death to the world that you may save the world, death to self-interest that you may find your own soul, death to the lesser that you may realise the larger good. I am almost afraid of using these terms, for they are now bandied about in religious circles in a way that often amounts to mere cant and formalism. In what sense can any man be said to have renounced the world or died to self while he holds aloof from

the world's woe and avoids everything that may jeopardise his security or lower him in the esteem of his fellows? There is nothing more unreal than the way in which we speak to-day of these high themes and their corresponding obligations. And the world has found it out. When you come to the average man now-a-days with your offer of a full and free salvation which he has nothing to do but accept, and which will secure him entrance into heavenly habitations, he does not listen. But come to him as Jesus came with the sternly loving demand that he should make his whole life an offering to the highest God has given him to see, and you have compelled him not only to listen but to choose. He knows well enough whether or no his name is in the Lamb's Book of Life, for he knows whether he is really trying to give himself for the life of the world or whether he is not. He knows what feelings dominate him most. He knows whether he is serving God or Mammon, or even trying to serve both at once. He knows whether the cause of truth and righteousness is stronger for his advocacy, or whether he has left to others the danger and the pain of helping to hasten its ultimate triumph. When Jesus came with His evangel to the world of nineteen hundred years ago, He came to such men as this not with an offer but with a demand—or rather an offer contained in a demand. So strenuous was that demand that few were able to see that it in itself was the evangel. It called men away from base desires and selfish aims and bade them give themselves without reserve to whatever cause needed them the most. To one man His word was, Follow me and be a

fisher of men. To another: Go and sell all that thou hast and give to the poor. To another: Are ye able to drink of my cup and be baptised with my baptism? Hardly any two alike, but underneath every summons was the requirement of a perfect self-devotion to the cause of God, which is only another name for the good of man.

It is to this that I call you. I respect your manhood too much to offer you anything less. From you God requires the utmost for the whole, and not until you are willing to give it will you begin to discover what life really means, and what a glorious thing it is to live. I reverence Jesus too much to put you off with the lie that He has done everything for you that needs to be done in order to make things pleasant for you in the world to come; but in His name I summon you to continue His work. To have your name written in His Book is to be of the company of those who have resisted unto blood striving against wrong. The greatest thing He ever did for you or for mankind was to make this a gospel and believe that men would rise to it. For so indeed they have, and ever will when they see it for what it is.

I read in one of the daily papers the other day of a thrilling incident which took place amid the scene of horror and consternation which followed the collision of the *St. Paul* and the *Gladiator* in the Solent. When the huge American liner crashed into the British warship, two or three seamen on the latter scrambled up the bows of the former into safety. No sooner had one of them done so, however, than he seemed to recollect himself, and called out: "My God, what have I

done? What will my captain say?" and immediately jumped back into the sinking ship. Whether he went down with her I do not know; I do not even know whether the story is true, or whether it is a journalistic invention, but I sincerely hope it is true. The spirit which prompted that simple seaman to leap back to his post in the face of death is the spirit which I seek to awaken in you for all the business of living. What will my Captain say? What is it He calls for? What does He expect from me? Those whose names are in His Book of Life are those who have found their salvation in ceasing to trouble about it, and offering themselves instead in response to His call to serve and heal. On the authority of Jesus Himself we have it that some may be in this Book of Life who do not even know it, the criterion of their worth being, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these My brethren, ye did it unto Me."

Dear fellow men, this is the real gospel, the gospel in which you will find redemption from self-seeking, and the joy that no man taketh from you. You cannot live it without God, but to try to live it is to find God. It is high as heaven, and deep as hell. It contains all that you will ever need for this world or the next. Sometimes you are sad and weary, no doubt, with the struggle to live, and the repeated disappointments and failures of life. You have been down in the mud time and again, and bruised and crushed your soul. There are some hideous things in your record, things that you wish could be blotted out for ever, things the very memory of which causes you shame and dread. Then there are times when you feel how

puny you are in face of the sinister forces of the world. You see cruel things done, and you are powerless to stop them. You see the lie triumphant and injustice unrebuked. You hear everywhere around you the cry of human anguish ascending towards a silent heaven, and perhaps you sink in bewilderment under the mystery and horror of it all. If you have a sympathetic heart you must sometimes burn to be able to find a remedy for it—a remedy for your own sin and other people's, a remedy for the darkness and the pain. Well, here it is. If God is to come *to* you He must come *through* you to the rescue of the world. If you are to escape from sin you must become a sin-bearer—there is no other way. If you would recover hope and confidence that the best is yet to be, you must be willing to die to make it so. Can you do it? Will you do it? Do you even want to be willing to do it? Courage, then, brother of Christ, your name is written in His Book and graven on His hands.

> This is life to come,
> Which martyr'd men have made more glorious
> For us who strive to follow. May I reach
> That purest heaven, be to other souls
> The cup of strength in some great agony,
> Enkindle generous ardour, feed pure love,
> Beget the smiles that have no cruelty—
> Be the sweet presence of a good diffused,
> And in diffusion ever more intense.
> So shall I join the choir invisible
> Whose music is the gladness of the world.

XX

THE LIFE BEYOND

"I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore."—REV. i. 18.

NUMBERS of hearers and readers of my sermons have from time to time asked me to state in public my view as to the experiences which await the individual soul in the life beyond the grave, if there be such a life. The point of the request usually is something like this:—If the orthodox Protestant belief in heaven and hell, conceived of as two entirely separate states of existence, and only two, is no longer admissible to enlightened thought, what are we to put in its place? Have we good grounds for believing in an after-life at all? If so, what becomes of the soul in that mysterious region? These are questions upon which an attitude of indifference is not possible to every one.

What, then, does our present experience, conjoined to a conviction that the universe is morally governed, warrant us in believing about the destiny of the individual soul? The subject thus opened up is an enormous one, and I can only hope to touch briefly to-night upon its more salient features. Our text tells us most that we need to know about it. The writer of this strange book is here speaking of Christ, but we are justified in using this language of every one who tries to live his life in fellowship

with Christ. Just as Jesus lived the life of self-sacrifice, even unto death, so are His followers called to do. And just as the life laid down in the case of Jesus meant that He was able to take it again in fuller and more glorious fashion, so the same principle ought to hold good in every life that is animated by the spirit of Jesus. "I am He that liveth and was dead, and, behold, I am alive for evermore," might be said of every great soul that has ever been given to and for the world.

You all know the uncertainty which prevails in many minds at the present time in relation to the life to come. There are not a few good people who have given up all hope of arriving at anything like a settled conviction in regard to it. They would tell us that we have no proof, however much we may desire it, that there is such a thing as continued self-conscious existence after death. Many people are constitutionally almost incapable of realising that there can be an existence apart from the body. When they hear the dreadful words spoken at the graveside—"Earth to earth; ashes to ashes; dust to dust"—it is practically impossible for them to resist the feeling that that is indeed the end, and that nothing more remains of him or her whom they have loved.

> Alas for him who never sees
> The stars shine through his cypress trees;
> Who hopeless lays his dead away,
> Nor looks to see the breaking day
> Across the mournful marbles play.

This state of mind is not confined to those who are without what is called religious faith. There are plenty of people who cling to the hope of im-

mortality without finding much consolation in it; when death comes to those they love they feel the separation to be as absolute as though there were no such thing as reunion in some fairer world. I do not mean that they disbelieve in re-union; on the contrary they try hard, even desperately, to find some comfort in the thought of it, but, often enough, the amount to be derived therefrom is not very great. Is there no one here present who has ever felt like this? Death has made a terrible gap in your affections; torn some beautiful joy out of your life; do you really feel—can you feel—as though the dear one who has gone is as much alive as ever and thinking of you? Is there never a moment when you shiver as you think of the cold rain falling in the darkness upon the little mound that hides from sight all that remains of what you once loved, and the memory of which is at once your greatest sadness and your greatest joy? You will admit, I think, that anything which goes to strengthen our realisation of the life beyond death cannot fail to be other than good.

But what have we that will do this? These are days in which the mind calls for proof of extraordinary assertions, and of all such there is none greater than that of the survival of the soul after death. Some doubt has of late been cast upon the common assumption that most people desire individual immortality. It has been pointed out that there are many who ask for nothing more than to lie down and rest when the day's work is done. One eminent scientist has declared that in time the normal healthy-minded man or woman will desire death when the time comes just as naturally as we

all desire sleep at the close of day. Certain it is, too, that the great majority of human beings face death complacently and calmly when the end actually arrives, however much they may have feared the change beforehand. But, even suppose we grant the force in these contentions, I still believe it to be overwhelmingly true that the ordinary civilised human being would be glad to be assured of the truth of the immortality of the soul; and I think the chief reason for this desire is not the preservation of the *ego* so much as a longing for the perpetuation of the higher relationships of human experience. It is love that is at the bottom of the unquenchable interest that most people seem to take in speculation about the unseen world. This is far from being discreditable to human nature. What is there to give in answer to it? In stating my own convictions on the subject to-night I wish to do two things:—First, to say briefly what I hold concerning the fact of immortality; and secondly, what on this basis we may expect the destiny of the soul to be.

In regard to the first of these points let me assure you that to me the cessation of any form of self-conscious existence seems unthinkable. No argument can convince the man who does not want to be convinced, but surely to a reflective mind belief in the persistence of self-consciousness is bound up with belief in all that is good and true. Such a statement as this may be challenged, but I cannot modify it. Observe how good men have suffered and died in all ages for what they have felt to be worthy of the homage of humanity, and observe with what striking unanimity they have professed

their faith in the ultimate victory of that for which they stood. But why should the good prove victorious any more than the bad? John Stuart Mill once asked that question without suggesting any answer, and yet the answer is written large on the page of human history. The man must be blind indeed who cannot see that in the long run the true is victorious over the false; good does prevail against evil; right is stronger than wrong. I have more than once argued with a pessimist who maintained the opposite, but it was impossible to take him seriously. Let those who are filled with apprehension concerning the future of the civilised world acquaint themselves with the past and they will feel reassured. I cannot stay to elaborate the point: all one need affirm is that the greatest waymakers of the race have been those with the most faith in the future, and their faith has been justified by results. Christ crucified always enters into His glory. And yet what is this faith but an invincible confidence in the moral government of the universe? Follow that out and see where it takes you. Here, I repeat, is one outstanding fact, namely, that that which is slain on the altar of sacrifice to-day rises in power to-morrow and lives for evermore. Is it then credible that in a universe where this is demonstrably true the victory should be wasted as soon as it is won? Is it conceivable that Jesus and Pilate should go down into the dust together and be lost in the same eternal silence? Does not such a supposition seem to cancel at once a great part of the value of what Jesus suffered to bring into manifestation? Look at the flagrant contradiction thus

involved. Here is a universe in which the highest is sure to prevail; yet this very universe will fling into nothingness the life by which it has prevailed! One might as well say the victory had not been gained at all; it is like painting a picture and burning it. True, all the noblest of the sons of God have been quite willing that it should be so, so far as they themselves were concerned, if only they could be sure that their work was done and had achieved its purpose. Dr. Parker once, in one of his moods, declared that the only immortality he desired was to live on in the good he had wrought for mankind—a lofty and honourable sentiment. That great pioneer of modern thought, Theodore Parker, a man who suffered untold hardship and persecution for his faithful witness to truth, put the same feeling into verse:

> The sad sense of human woe is deep
> Within my heart, and deepens daily there,
> I see the want, the woe, the wretchedness,
> Of smarting men, who wear, close pent in towns,
> The galling load of life. The rich, the poor,
> The drunkard, criminal, and they that make
> Him so, and fatten on his tears and blood—
> I bear their sorrows, and I weep their sins;
> Would I could end them! No: I see before
> My race an age or so; and I am sent
> For the stern work, to hew a path among
> The thorns—I take them in my flesh—to tread
> With naked feet, the road, and smooth it o'er
> With blood. Well, I shall lay my bones
> In some sharp crevice of the broken way.
> Men shall in better times stand where I fell,
> And journey singing on in perfect bands,
> Where I have trod alone, no arm but God's,
> No voice but His, Enough!—His voice, His arm.

Yes, just so. Great, grand, and good! But what kind of a moral universe would it be from

which a man like that could be blotted out? What would his work be worth if he could be spared from it? Why, he himself is its greatest product.

Now this is the evidence for immortality which best satisfies me. I need no other. I feel it is strong enough to carry the whole case. No Christ has ever died in vain, no saviour but has risen from the cross to the throne. The victory of truth on earth is but the sign and symbol of the reign of Christ in heaven; the lesser is the demonstration of the larger; to believe in the one is to affirm the other.

But I am perfectly willing to admit that this would not satisfy everybody. There are those who want to put their finger on the print of the nails, and these are not the least worthy amongst the sons of men. How the heart cries out for the touch of the vanished hand and the sound of the voice that is still! Well, I am no spiritualist; I have no knowledge of spiritualism except what I have read and heard from others; I have a profound distrust of most of the so-called evidence for spirit return. But when friends of my own, of unimpeachable probity, like Sir Oliver Lodge, speak of the results of long and painstaking investigation into supernormal phenomena as yielding something approaching to demonstration of the persistence of intelligent self-consciousness after the change called death, one cannot but give weight to it. Sir Oliver is a master in the felicitous use of metaphor, and many must have been impressed by one expression which fell from his lips during his address to the Psychical Research Society a week or two ago. He compared the labours of himself and his friends to

that of excavators engaged in boring a tunnel through a mountain mass to establish communication, if possible, between two territories; and added that operations had now been pushed so far that it seemed as though they could faintly hear the pick-axes of their comrades who were working from the farther side. It may be so; I devoutly hope it is so. Perhaps the day is not so very far distant when it will be as little possible to doubt the continued existence of those whom we have hitherto mourned as dead as it is now impossible to doubt the existence of the planet Mars.

Permit me to ask you at this point whether you are prepared for the readjustment in the religious point of view which must inevitably follow from such a scientific demonstration of a future life, if it ever comes? Already, the conventional heaven and hell must be relegated to the limbo of superseded forms of thought. The only reasonable belief that can be substituted for them is that the law of cause and effect must hold good in other spheres than this. We cannot expect to escape the consequences of our follies, or to reap where we have not sown. This is no individualistic gospel, for it recognises that we may be each other's burden-bearers, and that the nearer we draw to the moral likeness of Christ the more we shall wish to be such. But no man can appropriate the character of a Christ unless he has grown it. Those who love him may suffer with him, may even suffer for him, but they cannot make him a present of a Christ-like soul apart from any effort of their own. We see that to be so in this world; why should it be different anywhere else? You and I are every

day of our lives bearing burdens for other people, or having ours borne for us. We may be the better for it in both cases, but we never dream that a noble man can make his character over to a scoundrel and say: "I know you are a rascal; you have been a scheming, selfish tyrant to your fellows; you have been covetous and hypocritical, base and sordid in your aims; but I am willing that you should have as a deed of gift all that I know of God and life, and all that I feel concerning love and truth." One man might be quite willing to make that deed of gift, and another to benefit by it, but it could not be done. We know that it never is done. No man becomes a Christ at a bound. From what we know of life here it is therefore fair to assume that we may go on helping one another and suffering for one another in the life beyond the grave, but we shall have to grow our individual spiritual character exactly as we are doing now under the guidance of the Holy Spirit of God. Where we have failed to do this we shall have to learn the mistake and start afresh. We shall not be left to labour and suffer alone. Our Master and Lord will be with us at every step in the road, and all the love in the universe will be on our side in the effort to reach the highest of all. There is nothing to fear in that dim unknown unless we have been living in the outer darkness of a self-centred life here. If that has been so, we shall have to find out that it was never worth our while. We shall have to renounce the false ideal and turn to the true. All the petty vanities and conceits which are absorbing so much of our energy now will be seen in their true colours then, and we shall despise the

folly that led us to prefer them. We shall see our life just as it is, with no possibility of self-deception about it. We may be slow to acknowledge that we have been wrong, but if so we shall have to wait outside the gates of blessedness until a better spirit awakens within us. There will be no one to fawn upon and flatter us, for the things will be absent that give us any material advantage here. Death will strike away most of the externals which deceive men in their own eyes or give them a fictitious prominence and value in the eyes of the world. The miser will have his miser's soul but not his hoarded gold. The sensualist will keep his cravings, but not the means of satisfying them. The coward and the oppressor will find that there never has been any gain worth sacrificing a fellow man for. Eternal love will teach them these things, but the lesson may begin in pain.

One thing we shall all have to learn, and that is that our heaven is within us before it can find outward expression. Even in this world that is true to a greater extent than most people dream. Once get a man at peace with God, free him from all fear for his own self-interest, and you will find that circumstances have very little power either to make or mar his happiness. He may sorrow, but never as those without hope. In the world to come we shall find our heaven on our appropriate moral level; the soul and its environment will correspond in a fuller degree than here. The richer and fuller the love within us, the grander and wider the expression it will find. And with the ascent of the soul will come a sweeter perception of our essential unity with all mankind and a greater willingness to

give all we have and are in order to hasten the perfect realisation of that unity. It will be the consummation spoken of by the apostle Paul: All things are to be summed up in Christ, and the kingdom delivered up to God the Father, that God may be all in all.

In conclusion let me epitomise the matter in a few sentences. Nothing worthy to live shall ever perish.

> And though, in this lean age forlorn,
> Too many a voice may cry
> That man shall have no after morn,
> Not yet of these am I.
> The man survives, and whatso'er
> He wrought of good or brave
> Will mould him through the cycle year
> That dawns behind the grave.

Because Christ lives you shall live also. Earthly love shall find its fruition in the world which neither death nor sin can enter. Those we call dead are more alive than ever, and if they ever loved us they have not ceased to think of and pray for us. The meaning of life is clearer to them now, and probably they are able to help us by their prayers on our behalf in a far greater measure than was possible to them in the prison-house of the flesh. The universe of God, visible and invisible, is a garment woven without seam throughout. "In my Father's house are many mansions," but it is still one house, the temple of the living God.

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